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by Mack Reynolds

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WORLDS OF TOMORROW®

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ALL NEW STORIES

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EARTH, SKY AND US

Since so much of science fiction takes place Out There in Space, it's pleasant now and then to look out at what we can see of space from down here on the Earth. A couple of interesting events are coming up around this time of year; you might like to keep an eye on them.

If you look toward the western sky in the late afternoon of June 14th, you may be able to see a daylight eclipse — anyway, a partial eclipse — of the moon. The chance of seeing it depends largely on where you live. On the East coast of the United States, the eclipse is in progress right around sundown; on the West coast, it occurs during broad daylight . . . and as only about 18% of the Moon's surface will be darkened anyway, you probably won't be able to notice a difference. A month later, on July 24th, you can watch the planet Venus narrowly miss occulting the star Regulus. Sometimes it doesn't miss. As recently as 1959 there was an actual occulation, which gave us our best measure of Venus's atmosphere as observatories watched the star dim behind the planet; but this time there will be about a degree between them.

All this, as well as a great deal of other fascinating lore about skywatching, comes out of a book called *The Yearbook of Astronomy: 1965.* It's edited by Patrick Moore, and published in the United States by Norton; and no amateur stargazer should be without it. For some irritating reason, probably having to do with the fact that it is an English import, the publishers don't seem to be able to get it out before mid-spring, which pretty well makes the monthly notes for January, February and March a rueful reminder of What Might Have Been rather than a practical guide . . . but perhaps they'll get that straightened out for the 1966 edition. Otherwise . . . well, you can't tell the planets without a scorecard; and this is the best we've seen.

Another recent book that we thought you'd be interested in has to do with what's going on right down here on Earth.

We've all heard about the population explosion; in fact we can see it exploding before our very eyes. A couple of centuries ago, the world population was around a billion. By the end of this century, at least two countries — China and India — will each have that many persons within their own borders; and the world total may be eight or ten times that much. What causes this incredible proliferation of people? Reduction of the death rate? (But France and Ireland, with as low a death rate as you could wish, are

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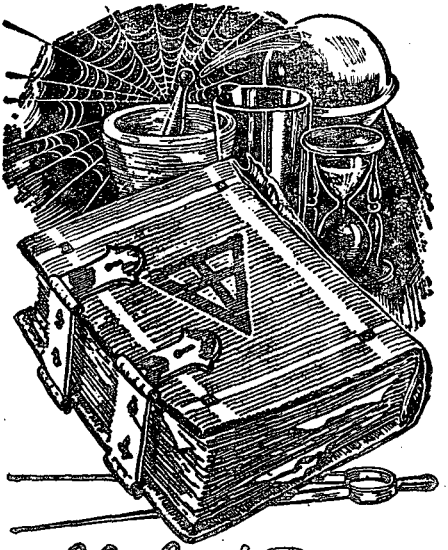
Secrets entrusted to a few



The Unpublished Facts of Life

THERE are some things that cannot be generally told—*things you ought to know.* Great truths are dangerous to some—but factors for *personal power* and *accomplishment* in the hands of those who understand them. Behind the tales of the miracles and mysteries of the ancients, lie centuries of their secret probing into nature's laws—their amazing discoveries of *the hidden processes of man's mind,* and *the mastery of life's problems.* Once shrouded in mystery to avoid their destruction by mass fear and ignorance, these facts remain a useful heritage for the thousands of men and women who privately use them in their homes today.

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either static or actually declining over the past few decades.) A cultural incentive toward large families, particularly in the Orient? (But in the overwhelming majority of cases married couples seek out birth-control help even in those countries; they simply cannot afford the most effective kinds.) Religious injunctions? (But as far as can be determined in pluralistic societies like the United States, where the difference in family size between members of the various religions should be most apparent — but where, unfortunately, a diffidence about inquiring into religious matters makes exact census figures unreliable — the difference is too small to measure. Most Catholic families are somewhat larger than most non-Catholic families, it is true. But it is also true that most Catholic families are in the national-origin and income groups which produce larger families no matter what the religion is.)

In *The Politics of Population* (Doubleday Anchor), William Petersen takes a thoughtful look at the realities of population pressure, at what we can do about it and at what we clearly cannot — because we've tried to do it and failed. (It's some comfort that the managed societies of Russia and China are as obviously incompetent in these matters as ourselves!) In the fifteen years after World War II some 59 million babies were born in the United States. As only 19 million persons were considerate enough to die and help make room for them, we have — well, what we have. A population growing rather more rapidly than anyone really likes.

It isn't going to get better. It's going to intensify. And what do we do in, say, 3965, when the sign is raised up that says *Standing Room Only?*

Our articles this month offer a couple of fresh viewpoints that we think will interest you. *Lunar Weapons Tomorrow* suggests the first *military* objective in the Moon program that seems to us to make much sense (although, actually, we have the opinion that the real importance of getting Out There has little to do with any military objectives at all. It's pure knowledge that's to be gained in space — worth more than any temporary tactical advantage anyway.)

Then there's Michael Girsdansky's *The Shape of Us to Come.* We've touched on this subject before — most recently in Lester del Rey's *The Fruit of the Tree* — but Girsdansky's piece not only comes to the question of genetic manipulation from a somewhat different perspective, but adds some new and important data that, when del Rey wrote his article half a year ago, simply did not exist yet. This is another example of science fiction that, before long, may be science fact . . . perhaps sooner than we think!

How do you like these articles, by the way? It's not a rhetorical question; we'd appreciate it if you'd drop us a line from time to time and let us know. Lacking a letter column in *Worlds of Tomorrow* we get comparatively little mail — which is a pity, because it's only through your comments that we can tell how close we are coming to producing the magazine you'd like best.

So if there's anything you think we're doing wrong — or that we're doing right and you'd like to make sure we keep *on* doing right — don't hesitate. Let us hear from you . . .

—THE EDITOR

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Of Godlike Power

by MACK REYNOLDS

Illustrated by GAUGHAN

The Power was far beyond a man's ability to deal with or to control—too bad a man had to deal with it!

" . . . The will is free
Strong is the soul, and wise, and beautiful
The seeds of godlike power are in us still
Gods are we, Bards, Saints, Heroes, if we will."

Matthew Arnold

I

Jerry, in the control booth, was making stretching motions. Ed Wonder looked up at the studio clock. They were running long.

He said to the guest, "To go back a bit. You used a couple of terms

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there that most of us haven't been checked out on, I'm sure." He looked down at the pad upon which he scribbled notes as the program continued. "Palin . . . palin . . . something or other."

"Palingenesis," Reinhold Miller said, only the slightest trace of condescension there.

"That's right. And Metempsychosis. Did I get that one?"

"That is correct. Metempsychosis. The passage of the soul from one body to another. From the Latin, which in turn was from the Greek. In all modesty I would still suppose that I am the world's outstanding authority on palingenesis and metempsychosis."

Ed Wonder said, "You defined metempsychosis for us; just what is palingenesis?"

"It means rebirth, regeneration, the doctrine of transmigration of souls."

"Well, how does that differ from metempsychosis?"

"I am afraid that time limitations prevent my going into the matter in the detail that would be necessary to completely clarify the subject."

"That's too bad. Well, here's another item I wanted to ask about. You say you've been reincarnated three times. You were first born as Alexander, the Macedonian who conquered the Persian empire. You described how you died of a fever after the big binge in Babylon, and then your, ah. soul was transmigrated into the newly born body of Hannibal, the Carthaginian who later nearly, but not quite, defeated Rome. After Hannibal committed suicide by taking poison, you woke up again in the body of Marshel Ney, Napoleon's right hand man."

"That is all correct."

"What I wondered about is where your, ah, soul was in between. If my ancient history isn't all kooked up, Alexander was something like four hundred years or so B.C. And Hannibal led his elephants over the Alps perhaps a hundred and fifty years later. Don't hold me to those dates, folks, I was the top champ at cutting classes when it came to ancient history. And, let's see, Marshal Ney must have been born in the 18th Century if he fought with Napoleon. That's a pretty long hop from your first reincarnation to your second."

Reinhold Miller said stiffly, "There is no time in death."

"How was that again?"

"One feels no sense of lapse between lives. When I was executed in my incarnation as Michel Ney, there seemed a sudden flash of light and pain, and then I was conscious immediately of being newly born into the world as a crying child."

Ed Wonder touched the tip of his nose with a thoughtful forefinger, then consciously took it away. He was going to have to kill that mannerism if he ever got the program onto television, it looked kooky.

He said, "Well, there was one other thing, Mr. Miller. Don't you think it's somewhat of a coincidence that in all three of your earlier, ah, incarnations, you were one of the greatest military geniuses the world has ever seen?"

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"Perhaps mine is a soul of destiny."

"What did you tell us your present occupation is, Mr. Miller?"

"I am an accountant."

Ed Wonder looked down at his pad. "Oh yes. Here we are. Assistant accountant at the Brisby Department Store, in Brisby, Pennsylvania. I thought practically all accounting was automated in these days of the Welfare State. Brisby must be a bit behind. But aren't you somewhat surprised that your latest incarnation wasn't Douglas MacArthur, or Eisenhower, or possibly Viscount Montgomery? You know, just to keep it consistent."

"It is not mine to question. The eternal spirit moves in mysterious ways."

"Well, look. What I meant was that two or three times before we've had reincarnations on the program. And what's always surprised me about people who, ah, claim to be born again, is that it's never the gardener who worked the swing shift in Tamerlane's melon patch, but always Tamerlane himself. It's never a chimney sweep in Moscow, in the year 1175, but Catherine the Great. How come you folks who get reincarnated were always big shots?"

Miller took it, as he took everything, with calm dignity and an appealing sincerity which, Ed decided, the twitch element listening in were probably swallowing like crazy.

"I might refer you to the case of Bridey Murphy."

"Touche," Ed said jovially. "You got me there. Folks, you'll remember way back in 1956 or so when the country was all interested in a lady out Colorado way who used to go into hypnotic trances and recall a former life in which she was a simple Irish colleen in the late 18th Century."

His phone clicked and he took it up.

Dolly said, "Professor Dee is on, Little Ed. He wants to ask the guest some questions."

Ed Wonder hung up and made a signal to Jerry in the engineer's booth.

He said, "Folks, I've just had a call from Professor Varley Dee. You old hands remember the Professor, teaches anthropology over at the university. We've had him on as a panelist half a dozen times over. The Professor is one of the great skeptics of all time. Folks, he just don't buy nothin'. Professor Dee wants to ask our honored guest of the evening, Mr. Reinhold Miller, a few questions, and if Mr. Miller doesn't mind, we'll just switch on the old beeper phone which is a method by which you listeners can hear both ends of the conversation. All right Mr. Miller?"

"I am perfectly willing to answer any questions whatsoever," he answered calmly.

"Fine. Well, Professor?" Ed Wonder asked.

Varley Dee's cranky voice crisped in. "You say you were once Alexander the Great. If that is so, you must clearly remember the battle of Issus, the most famous of Alexander's victories."

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"I remember it as though it happened yesterday."

"I'm sure you do," Dee said in sarcasm. "Now then, during the battle where was Ptolemy?"

"Who?"

"Ptolemy, Ptolemy. Later the founder of the Macedonian dynasty in Egypt and the ancestor of Cleopatra."

"Oh." Reinhold Miller cleared his throat. "Your pronunciation is faulty. He . . ."

"I studied Ancient Greek for eight years," Professor Dee snapped.

". . . fought on the left flank."

"Like hell he did," Dee said. "He was . . ."

"Gentlemen, gentlemen," Ed said gently, "we're on the air."

". . . one of the Companions and fought side by side with Alexander, Black Clitus and the rest of . . ."

"Nonsense," Miller said, snap in his voice. "You picked that up in some silly history book. *I* know where he fought. Who could know better? *I* was there."

Jerry was making circular motions to Ed Wonder from the control booth. Wind it up.

Ed began to cut in, but Dee was saying over the beeper phone, "All right, I'll admit I wasn't there. However, some of those historians you scorn — including Ptolemy himself, who wrote an account — were. But here's another question. Still sticking to Ptolemy. What was his surname?"

Miller's face worked.

"Come, come," the Professor urged. "He was one of Alexander's closest friends."

Ed reluctantly came to the rescue. He said, "Gentlemen, we're going to have to call time. Sorry, perhaps we can get together on another occasion. Thank you . . ."

"His surname was *Soter*," Professor Dee crowed. "As Alex . . ." but at that point Jerry killed the beeper phone contact.

". . . thank you, Professor Dee. And especially thank you, Mr. Reinhold Miller, who joined us tonight to explain his reincarnation three times over. This is station WAN, the Voice of the Hudson Valley, coming to you from Kingsburg, New York. And you have been listening to Edward Wonder's Far Out Hour." He cued the engineer by saying, "Let the music go round and round, Jerry."

The red light flickered off, indicating the studio was no longer hot. Ed Wonder leaned back in his chair and shifted his shoulders in an elaborate stretch. He tensed up on mike, particularly on these long programs in which he had to carry most of the dialogue.

Reinhold Miller said, "You mentioned back there the possibility of my appearing again on the program. I'd be glad . . ."

"I'll bet you would." Ed Wonder yawned deliberately.

The other looked at him. "I beg your pardon?"

Ed Wonder's small briefcase was on the padded table before him. They padded studio tables so that non-pro guests couldn't make unwanted noises to go out over the air by drumming fingernails or pencil points. He brought forth some papers

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and a check book. "Let's see," he said. "Your take was to be fifty bucks and expenses, right?"

"That was the agreement. Look here . . ."

Ed Wonder had brought forth his pen. "No, you look here, Miller. We get a lot of kooky people on this program. Folks who tell about seeing little green men coming out of flying saucers, folks who claim they're clairvoyants, mediums, fortune tellers, necromancers, witches. We even had a guy thought he was a werewolf once." He was writing rapidly, even as he spoke. "But you know something? Most of them are sincere. For all I know, some of them might even be right. We've got open minds on this program."

"I . . . I don't know what you mean, Mr. Wonder."

"I think you do. I thought when I offered to pay your expenses and fifty dollars for your time, you were a man — mistaken or not — who really believed he had lived in earlier incarnations." Ed Wonder grunted depreciation. "Anybody can read up a bit on historical characters like Alexander, Hannibal and Ney."

The other's lips were pale and thin.

"You can't talk to me that way. I came here in good faith," Miller protested.

"And to pick up a quick fifty bucks. The proof of the pudding, Miller. You weren't able to answer Professor Dee's questions. As a historian he had read more on Alexander and his men than you had."

"See here, Mr. Wonder, I admit I've read a great deal about the men whose bodies I formerly occupied. I admit also that some details of my earlier incarnations I have forgotten. This could happen to anyone. Surely there are details in your own life that you have forgotten."

The radio man was yawning, even as he waved the check in the air to dry it. "Here's your travel expenses. And now I'll write you a separate check for your loot."

Reinhold Miller flushed angrily. "I'll take the expense money, because I need it. But if you think I'm a fake, Mr., you can keep the fifty."

"That's up to you. Please sign this receipt for total compensation."

Reinhold Miller grabbed the pen, signed, took up the small check, turned sharply on his heel and left through the sound-padded door to the hall. Ed Wonder looked after him calculatingly for a moment, then stuffed his things back into the briefcase.

Jerry was motioning to him from the control room, and he arose and sauntered in, lighting a cigarette.

Ed Wonder said, "Jerry, where in the devil do you get your clothes, from the Salvation Army? You make the program look crumby. And what do you smoke in that prehistoric pipe, soft coal?"

The engineer grunted around the stem of the pipe in question, then said, "This isn't TV. Even if it was, I wouldn't be on camera. Did you do him out of his money, Little Ed?"

"What?"

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"Alexander the Great, in there."

"He was a fake."

"You know, he might be missing a few marbles but he believed in it. He *thought* he was telling the truth."

"That's not the way I received it. This program's on a limited budget, Jerry."

"Yeah. And if there's anything left over at the end of the month, it goes into your pocket. You get a flat sum for the package."

"What's it to you?"

"Not a thing. I love to watch you operate. They can automate nine people out of ten out of work, but the eternal chisler we will always have with us."

Ed Wonder flushed. "I suggest you keep your nose out of my business if you want to stay out of trouble."

Jerry took his pipe from his mouth and grunted humor. "Trouble! From *you*, Little Ed? What kind of trouble could you cause anybody?" He examined the knuckles of his right hand, reflectively. "That a smash in that cute little moustache wouldn't cure."

The other took a quick half step back. He gathered himself and said nastily, "Is all this what you called me in here for?"

"Patso came in while you were on mike. He wants to see you."

"Mulligan? What's he doing here this time of night?"

Ed Wonder turned and left before waiting for an answer. There was a small hall immediately outside the soundproofed door which opened into the control room. There were two other similar doors, one of which opened into Studio Three which Ed Wonder had utilized for his late hour program and the other into the corridor beyond.

Ed walked down the corridor to the offices, coming up to Dolly's desk before going on to his own to leave his briefcase. He pretended to flinch.

"Holy smokes, what've you done to your hair?"

She touched it. "Oh, do you like it, Little Ed? It's the latest-latest from Italy. The Fantasy-mode."

He shook his head, eyes closed in sorrow. "Do you think women's hair will ever come back?" He dropped the bantering tone. "Look, Dolly, one thing. Try to look alive on the program, eh? You don't have to give me long messages while I'm on mike. Cut it short. It would've been enough to just say, 'Professor Dee. Questions.' I'm not stupid. I would've caught on."

Her mouth tightened. "Yes, Mr. Wonder."

"Well, watch it."

He went over to his own desk, put the briefcase in a drawer and locked it. He started toward Matthew Mulligan's office, adjusted his bow tie. He paused before the door a moment, then knocked two careful raps.

The station head was seated behind his desk, listening to the Rock'n' Swing music which followed Ed Wonder's show and looking as though it wasn't helping his digestion.

"You wanted to see me, Mr. Mulligan?"

The older man looked him directly

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in the eye and blatted, "My country, may she always be right . . ." And then left it there.

Ed Wonder blinked. The other was evidently waiting for him to finish the quotation. His mind hurried it up. He said, "Ah . . . but my country, right or left."

". . . but my country, right or *wrong*," Mulligan said accusingly. "I can see you're not a member of the society."

It came to Ed Wonder. The Stephen Decatur Society, an organization that considered the Birchers too far left. He had heard that Matthew Mulligan was a member.

"Well, no sir," Ed said earnestly. "I was thinking of looking further into it, possibly joining up, but I've been awfully busy with the program. Have you thought any further of putting it on television, Mr Mulligan?"

"No, I haven't," Mulligan growled. "Sit down. You make me nervous jittering around. I didn't call you in to talk about your program, Little Ed, but while we're on it I don't mind admitting it's not quite what I pictured when you sold me the idea. Sure, sure, you get some character who says he flew to the moon in a flying saucer, but how come you've never got anybody to show us a chunk of it he brought back, or something? And these fortune tellers. What we need on your program is somebody who predicts Number One, over in Moscow, will get knocked off next Tuesday, and, bingo, it happens. Something like that'd have a dozen sponsors bidding for your show."

Ed Wonder wished he dared close his eyes in pain. Instead, he said hurriedly, "What was it you did call me in for, Mr. Mulligan?"

"Oh? Yeah, well, What're you doing tomorrow night, Little Ed?"

"I've got a date. Tomorrow's one of my free days, Mr. Mulligan."

"Well, maybe you can take her along. See here, have you ever heard of some twitch named Ezekiel Joshua Tubber?"

"I don't think so. A name like that I'd remember. I don't think it's possible to break this date."

The studio chief ignored him. "He's some kind of religious nut, or something. But the thing is, the society's got a couple of letters and a phone call complaining about him, understand? Claim he's subversive."

"I thought you said he was a religious twitch."

"Yeah, but subversive too. A lot of these reds hide out in the guise of religion. Like that archbishop over in England, whatever his name was. And some of these Jewish rabbis against segregation. Anyway, at the last meeting of the chapter it was decided to investigate this Tubber. So I was given the assignment."

Ed Wonder could see it coming. "This date. . ." he began hopefully.

"I don't know anything about religious nuts, but you, with this program, are all up on crackpots. So tomorrow night you can attend his meeting. Here's the address, an empty lot over on Houston Street. You can give a report at the next meeting of the chapter."

"Look, Mr. Mulligan, I wouldn't know a subversive if I found one

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under the bed." He played his trump.

"This date is with Helen."

"Helen?"

"Helen Fontaine. Jensen Fontaine's daughter."

"Helen Fontaine! What would a classy, high-stepping girl like Miss Fontaine see in . . ." He cut the question short with a burp, and pursed his heavy lips. "See here," he said finally, "did you ever talk to Mr. Fontaine about your program, now that it's been on awhile?"

"He's crazy for it," Ed said quickly. "He was telling me so just the other night. We were sitting around having a couple of drinks together while I was waiting for Helen to finish dressing."

"Oh, you were, eh?" The studio chief made facial motions as though he was chewing. "Well, see here. Mr. Fontaine is a member of the chapter, so is Helen, for that matter, even if she doesn't come around much. Why don't the two of you just take this tent meeting in for half an hour or so? That ought to be plenty."

II

"A tent meeting!" she said, unbelievingly. "I thought it was the end when you wanted to take in that tea leaf reader's convention but . . ."

"The Precognition Society," Ed said unhappily. "And it was mainly crystalloscopy, not tea leaves."

". . . this takes the frosted malted. Whatever gave you the idea I'd be willing to go to a religious revival meeting in lieu of a date, Little Ed Wonder?"

He explained hastily. Told her he would have put Mulligan in his place, hadn't it been that the whole thing was a Stephen Decatur Society project. Told her he'd thought she'd be hot to do a chore for the society. Told her they could cut it as short as she wanted. Told her he could spot a subversive in the first few moments of talk. Told her he was a commie spotter from way back. Told her he had denounced two of his schoolmates as undercover reds as early as third grade.

That last got to her and she made a moue at him. "All right, sharpy. But you'd better not let Daddy hear you being flippant like that. He takes the society seriously. Make us up a shaker of Martinis, while I powder my nose. We'll need them. A revival meeting, yet."

Later, in the Volkshover, she said, "When are you going to get off those impossible hours, Little Ed? I thought the idea was to build your program up and finally switch it to TV on Sunday morning."

Ed said, "Well, that's what I thought, but for some reason old Fatso Mulligan can't see it. He doesn't realize how many people go for this kooky stuff. Why, half the people in the country believe in one sort of far out idea or the other. And it's exactly that kind of twitch who spends half his life sitting in front of his idiot box." He cleared his throat. "Now, if you could get your father to drop a hint . . ."

"Oh, Daddy's not really concerned with the station," she said disinterestedly. "Just because he owns it. He owns a lot of things. What he's

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really interested in is the Society. He went to the convention in Los Angeles last week, and now he's hinting around darkly that the West Coast membership has been infiltrated by leftists. They passed a resolution that Goldwater wasn't a pinko."

They came to the empty acres on the outskirts of town which provided the room for a medium-sized tent which had been pitched almost in the exact center. It wasn't until they had drifted closer that they saw the second tent behind.

"Oh, *Mother*," Helen protested. "Does somebody *live* in that like — like gypsies?"

There weren't many cars descended on the area that had evidently been chosen for parking. Ed sank the beetle parallel to the others and switched off the lights. "It looks as if they're already under way," he said.

Helen said, "When are you going to get a *car*, Little Ed? I feel like a cockroach crawling in and out of this thing."

Under his breath, as he slid out from under the wheel, Ed muttered, "When I'm rich, honey, when I'm rich."

He took her arm to lead her toward what was obviously the entrance of the larger of the two canvas shelters.

She said, "Remember, we're going to go in there and leave again so quick they'll think we're some sort of blur."

There was a small reception committee at the entrance, two middle-aged types and a girl. They didn't exactly block the way, but it was simpler to stop a moment.

One of the middle-aged ones twisted her face in what was probably a smile and said, "Dear ones, are you pilgrims on the path to Elysium!"

Ed thought about that for a moment before saying, "I don't think so."

Helen said, "I know damn well I'm not."

Ed Wonder shot a quick look at her from the side of his eyes, wondering if she'd already had a couple of martinis before he had arrived at her house and mixed that batch. Helen stoned could be tricky.

Amusement came from a source unsuspected. The girl member of the reception committee laughed softly and said, "No, I'm afraid you aren't, at least as yet." She put a hand out. "I'm Nefertiti Tubber," she told them. "Tonight's Speaker of the Word is my father."

"Not just tonight," one of the others put in. "Ezekiel Joshua Tubber, is *the* Speaker of the Word. The guru of the path to Elysium."

"Anyone can spread the word, Martha," Nefertiti said softly.

"I'm losing track of this," Helen said. "Let's get in and see the big show."

Ed Wonder had taken the girl's proffered hand. It was both firm and soft in a disconcerting way. "Nefertiti, eh?" he said. "You deserve it."

The Tubber girl evidently didn't get that, but she smiled after them as Ed Wonder followed Helen into the tent and to chairs spank down in the front row. He decided that

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Helen'd had those preliminary drinks all right, all right. He would have settled for the rear.

The meeting was already under way and for the time the speaker's words didn't get through to the newcomers. While helping Helen with her coat and getting settled on the somewhat rickety wooden folding chair, Ed Wonder kept mental fingers crossed. The score or so who made up the balance of the audience didn't give the appearance of burn-'em-at-the-stake religious fanatics but still the last place Ed was in favor of starting a ruckus was a revival meeting.

Helen said, in a tone only one degree below a stage whisper, "With that beaver, he looks more like Abraham Lincoln than a preacher."

Ed said, "Shhh. Let's get a quick line on what he says."

Somebody else in the audience said shhhhh too, and Helen swiveled in her chair to glare.

As a matter of fact, Ed decided, Helen's description wasn't as far off as all that. There was a Lincolnesque quality about the old boy up on the speaker's stand, a transcendent beauty in the sheer ugliness of face. An infinite sadness.

He was saying, " . . . no matter how the system of representation or delegation of the governmental function is arranged, there is necessarily an alienation of part of the liberty and means of the citizen. . . "

Helen said from the side of her mouth, "What's he wearing, a suit made out of burlap bags?"

" . . . all parties, without exception, insofar as they seek for power, are varieties of absolutism."

Helen caught that phrase and sang out, "Even the Communist Party?"

Tubber — Ed Wonder assumed this must be Ezekiel Joshua Tubber — paused in mid-thought and looked down at her gently. "Especially the communists, dear one. Communism fails to recognize that, though man is a social being and seeks equality, he also loves independence. Property, in fact, springs from man's desire to free himself from the slavery of communism, the primitive form of society. But property, in its turn, goes to the extreme and violates equality and supports the acquisition of power by the privileged minority."

Whether or not that satisfied Helen Fontaine, Ed didn't know, but he was beginning to wonder what all this had to do with religion.

He whispered to Helen, "Whatever he is, he isn't a red. Let's go."

"No, wait a minute. I want to hear more of what the old goat has to say. How did a skinny old duffer like him ever get to be father of that pretty, plump little girl out front? He looks like he's eighty if he's a day."

Somebody back in the audience said, "Please, dear one, we cannot hear the Speaker of the Word."

Helen didn't bother to turn this time, but for the moment held her peace, to Ed's relief. He was beginning to be able to picture being thrown out of the assembly bodily, and if there was anything Ed Wonder hated, it was violence, particu-

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larly when it was directed at him. He brought his attention back to Tubber who seemed to be getting into the meat of his subject.

"So it is that we proclaim the road to Elysium must be taken. Such has become our lust for possessions, our mad, desperate scrabble for goods, for property, for material things, that we are making of this promised land granted by the All-Mother to our ancestors a veritable desert. The nation has already lost a third of the rich topsoil that it had when the Pilgrims landed. Consumption of oil has tripled since the end of the Second War, and although we possess but a seventh of the earth's proved resources, in our madness we are consuming more than half of the world's production. Once the world's leading exporter of copper, we are now the leading importer and our once tremendous reserves of lead and zinc are now so depleted that they are rapidly becoming uneconomic to work.

"But still the waste goes on. Still the demand for more and more consumption. Consume! Consume! they demand of us. Seek happiness desire for things. Consume! Consume! they tell us and endless millions are spent on the perverters of Madison Avenue so that our people will continue to demand, demand more things they need not. Why, dear ones, do you know that in this mad attempt to lure us into still greater consumption those who profit by this way of life spend five hundred dollars a year in packaging alone for every family in the nation. Five hundred dollars a year into what is largely waste! Why, dear ones, our brothers in such lands as India have a per capita income of but thirty-six dollars a year."

He was, Ed Wonder decided, really beginning to get steamed up now. However, it still didn't have much to do with religion. Other than an occasional reference to the *All-Mother*, whoever that was, and Tubber's habit of calling his audience *dear ones* it sounded more like an attack on the affluent society than a quest for salvation.

Ed looked at Helen from the side of his eyes. He had an idea that the fineness was beginning to wear off the alcoholic edge she had and she'd soon be ready to take off to strop it up again at the nearest auto-bar. He had an idea, too, that she was assimilating only every other sentence or so of Tubber's diatribe, in spite of her scowl of deep concentration.

". . . frivolous consumption. Why, we spend more for greeting cards than medical research. More on smoking, gambling and drinking than on education. More on watches and jewelry than on either basic scientific research or books . . ."

Ed began to whisper, "Look, this guy isn't a subversive. Just a chronic malcontent. What do you say we take off?" He added as a clincher, "We can make a bee-line for the closest auto-bar."

But Helen wasn't having any. Her voice came clear and loud. "What are you moaning about, Dads? America has the greatest standard of living in the world. Nobody ever had it so good."

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Silence fell.

Not even the shushers to their rear broke it.

Somehow, the gentle-faced, sad-faced oldster who had been holding forth in a quiet persuasive voice in spite of the nature of his attack, seemed to grow several inches in height, put on twenty or more pounds in pure bulk. For a moment, inanely, Ed wondered if the wobbly speaker's stand would hold this added weight.

He whispered to Helen, "Did you say Abe Lincoln? He looks more like John Brown about to free the slaves at Harper's Ferry."

Helen began to say something, but her voice was drowned in the rumble of thunder from Ezekiel Joshua Tubber.

"Standard of living, thou sayest! Is it standard of living that we must have a new vehicle every two or three years, whilst the old is discarded? Is it standard of living that a woman must needs own half-a-dozen bathing suits or think she is under-privileged? Is it standard of living that appliances are so constructed — planned obsolescence they call it — that it is all but impossible to get them home from the store before collapse? Indeed, we of the United States have used up in the past forty years, more of the world's resources than all the populations of earth has used in all of recorded history up until 1914, in this false pursuit of living standards. Dear one, it is madness. The road to Elysium must be taken!"

Ed Wonder was shaking her arm, but Helen wasn't having any. "Don't call me *dear one*, Dads. Just because you have to live in a tent and wear gunny sacks doesn't mean the rest of us want to."

Ezekiel Joshua Tubber grew another half foot. "Thou hast failed to hear the word, O woman of vanity. Have I not said that the gifts of the All-Mother are being frivolously wasted in the name of thy vanities? Look though at thyself. At thy dress, which thou wilt wear but half a dozen times before discarding for new fashion, new style. Look at thy shoes, so fragile as to need the cobbler's care after but a few wearings. Look at thy visage, touched with multiple paints at fabulous cost, and always at the expense of wasting the gifts of the All-Mother. Did I not saith earlier that our copper is all but gone? Still every year women throw away hundreds of millions of brass lipstick holders, and brass is made largely of copper. Take up the path to Elysium, O woman of vanity!"

"Listen, Helen . . ."

But Helen was into it now. On her feet, she laughed at the enraged prophet.

"Maybe that daughter of yours, out front, would be enjoying herself on a date instead of hanging around a tent meeting, if she used a little makeup herself, Dads. And you can sound off the rest of the night about this path to the All-Mother, or whatever, but you're not going to talk me, or anybody else with good sense, out of looking my smartest. The number of style-conscious people is growing, and there's nothing you can do about it."

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"Listen, let's get out of here," Ed pleaded. He was on his feet too, tugging her toward the aisle that led to the entrance. All over again, inanely, he wondered how the rickety wooden stand upon which Ezekiel Joshua Tubber stood could hold the swollen fury of the man. And even as he tugged, he wondered at the stricken faces of the small audience.

Only for a moment did Tubber hold his breath, then the voice came in a roar that would have silenced Gotterdammerung.

"Verily now, I curse the vainglory of women. Verily I say that never again wilt thou find pleasure in vanity of the person. In truth, ne'r again wilt thou pleasure in paint or bright fashion of clothing!"

For the first time in the past five minutes, there was the slightest of sound from one of the group of faithful who had seemingly been stunned to silence at Helen's temerity. Someone breathed, in awe, ". . . the power . . ."

III

"Come on," Ed urged through his teeth. "First thing you know, these kooks will want to lynch you." He hustled her up the aisle, trying to make with an air of sincere apology whilst at the same time projecting an it's-all-in-fun attitude. He doubted if it was going over. Helen was giggling softly. He could have strangled her.

The girl was a caution. Three or four quick ones and anything could and did happen. That time she slugged the cop on the George Washington Bridge. He began to wonder how far out the limb of ambition a man should climb, in the way of making a good business marriage.

Just before the entrance, he shot a quick look back over his shoulder. The audience still sat as though stricken. Up on the rostrum, old Tubber seemed to be regaining his composure. Somehow, he had shrunken to his original proportions. Once again, his appearance was that of a gentle Lincoln.

Outside, Helen shook her arm free. "Let go," she giggled. "I really got him boiling, didn't I?"

"You got him boiling, all right. Come on, let's get out of here before he changes his mind and decides to sic the faithful after us." But even as he said it, he doubted there was physical danger in the old man and his handful of followers.

The girl who had introduced herself as Nefertiti Tubber came hurrying up from the direction of the smaller tent.

"What . . . I heard father . . ."

Helen said, "Simmer down, dahling. Nothing happened."

Ed Wonder said, "You ought to look out for the old boy. He's apt to blow a gasket one of these days." He ran his eyes up and down the girl appreciatively.

She had pulled to a halt. "I . . . heard his voice raised in wrath."

Helen yawned. "Your language is almost as fruity as his is, dahling. He got a little sore, that's all."

"But, Miss Fontaine, father should never lose his temper. He is the Speaker of the Word."

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Helen scowled at her. "How did you know my name?"

Nefertiti began to say something, tightened her mouth momentarily, while her neck went pinkish.

"Oh, *Mother*," Helen laughed. "The girl can blush. I don't think I've seen anyone blush for years."

Ed said, "Come to think of it, how *did* you know Helen's name?"

The girl said, lowly, " . . . I've seen your picture in the papers, Miss Fontaine."

They looked at her. Helen laughed again. "So, while poppa sounds off against fashions and cosmetics, daughter reads the Sunday society page and yearns."

The pink evolved to rose. "Oh . . . oh no . . . "

"Oh yes, Goody Two Shoes. I'll bet a pretty." Helen turned to Ed Wonder. "Come on, Little Ed. I'm dying on the vine. Let's scare up a belt." She started toward the car.

Ed looked at the girl before following. He said, "Sorry about getting the old boy roused up. He was doing pretty good in there. At least he's sincere. I meet a lot of phonies in my line."

He got the feeling that she wasn't particularly used to talking to men. At least when she was alone with one. Her eyes went down to the ground and she said, "I suppose you do, Edward Wonder." She turned quickly and went into the tent.

Ed looked after her. What the devil, she had known his name too. Well, he squared his shoulders in a preen, that wasn't as strange as knowing Helen's. His program was evidently taking on to the point where he was recognized. Confound it, if he could only get the show on TV, he'd have it made. He hurried after Helen.

Back in the car, and over the road, they reversed roles. Now, that whatever physical danger might have been involved was behind them, Ed Wonder could find humor in the situation, but Helen was sobering by the minute and on the morose side.

She said finally, "Maybe I shouldn't have done that."

"What, the madcap socialite, regretting?"

She tried to chuckle. "Actually, he's a beautiful old man. Did you dig that air of sincerity?"

Ed reversed himself on what he had said to Nefertiti. "That's the stock in trade of religious kooks. You should see some of the characters I've had on the program. There was this one who claimed he had spotted a flying saucer landing. He went over to it and was taken aboard and off for a ride to Jupiter. On Jupiter — evidently, he could breath the air and the gravity was exactly the same as here on earth — they taught him the local religion and told him to return to earth and spread the message. They said that several times before they had come to earth and trained a man to propagate the message, but each time it had become garbled. Moses, Jesus, Mohammed and the Buddha were among those who loused up the true religion revealed to them by the Jupiterians."

Helen said, "Jet it up, will you? I need a drink. I feel awful. How

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could you keep from laughing in this character's face?"

Ed put a bit more pressure on the thrust pedal. "That's what I mean. To listen to the guy, you'd think he was giving you a real square shake. Sincerity just dribbled from him. After that program, hundreds of letters came in wanting to know more about this revealed religion of his. He had mentioned that he was writing a book. The *New Bible* he called it. At least fifty orders came in, most of them with money enclosed. I tell you, when it comes to religion, people believe anything. The more off-beat it is, the more faith they have. Whatever that is."

"Little Ed Wonder, I'll have to get Daddy to have Mulligan switch you back to morning soap operas. That far-out program of yours is making a cynic of you."

"That's all I need. It took me years to get a program of my own."

Her tone changed. "Besides, you shouldn't talk that way about faith. There's certainly nothing wrong with real faith."

He took her in from the side of his eyes. "What's real faith?"

"Oh, don't be so sharpy. You know what I mean. Real religion. Where are we going? I definitely need a drink. I guess that argument with old whiskers upset me."

"I thought we'd go to the *Saloon*, they've got a real bartender there. I like a real bartender. Sort of cozy."

The fact was, he had credit with Dave Zeiss, at the *Saloon*. You can't swing credit in an automated bar. Squiring Helen Fontaine around ran into money. You had to dress up to her, you had to be able, on demand, to take her to such spots as the Swank Room. He was lucky she didn't object more strongly to his Volkshover. She thought it was some kind of affectation. Her own General Ford Cyclones were auto, of course. Even the sports model. He doubted if Helen could drive, had she been in a situation where she had actually to manipulate the controls.

"I don't think I've ever been there," she said idly. "What's wrong with an automated bar?"

"It's just that I sort of like bartenders. When I was first beginning to drink, it was all live bartenders."

She looked at him. "Why, you can't be more than thirty. Little Ed."

"Thirty-three. Besides, I started young."

"Oh, Mother, I feel awful. How far is this place of yours? Thirty-three? Why in the world do you continue to hang around in radio, Little Ed? Why don't you go into business, like everybody else I know? Doesn't money make any difference to you at all?"

He rolled his eyes upward, in knowledge that the darkness hid his expression. "I don't know. I like radio. Of course, I'd rather have the program on TV. You sure you couldn't drop a word to your father?"

"I positively *itch*. Where is this place?" Her tone was getting on the petulant side. Confound it she was a spoiled brat.

"Coming up now." Ed dropped the lift lever and drifted into the *Saloon's*

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parking area. It was far enough out of the city's center for parking to be above ground. Even as he went through the motions of killing the Volkshover's life, opening the door for her and escorting her toward the brilliantly lighted bar Ed Wonder was muttering inwardly. *Why didn't he go into business . . . didn't money make any difference at all?* Ha! Why didn't he raise walruses in goldfish bowls?

The neon lights outside the *Saloon* glared garishly but once in the door the dimness man seeks when he drinks was such that for a moment it was necessary to stand until eyes became accustomed to the gloom.

"Let's sit at the bar," Helen said. "Order me a Travarica while I freshen up." She was off to the ladies' room.

Ed took a stool at the bar. Travarica yet. Yugoslavian herb brandy which had to be stone-age old before it was fit to drink. Just as sure as inflation when she went out with one of her zillionaire kooks she ordered beer.

Dave Zeiss came up, a bar rag in hand, and they swapped standardized amenities. Ed made his request for credit which was accepted, ordered the drinks.

He said, "Listen how about turning off that screen and the juke box? Between the two I can't hear my marbles rattle."

Dave chuckled appreciatively. "I never before did hear that one Mr. Wonder. You radio guys always got them on tap. How come you don't like no music being in the business and all?"

"That's the exact reason I don't like no music," Ed growled. "Just because three quarters of the country doesn't have anything to do but sit and stare at their idiot boxes giving me a job supplying something for them to stare at or listen to doesn't mean I have to like it too."

Dave was shaking his head. "Gees I'm sorry Mr. Wonder but I can't turn them off. I got other customers. You know how folks are. They go squirrel if it gets too quiet. If there wasn't no music going on they'd go to the next joint."

"I wanted to do some serious talking with the lady I'm with."

"I tell you Mr. Wonder I'd like to do it but it wouldn't do no good even if I did. Even if they did stick around, they'd just start tuning in their portables. There's hardly anybody any more doesn't carry around at least a portable radio usually a TV."

A new voice said "Little Ed Wonder! Horatio Alger's representative on radio!"

Ed looked around. "Hi Buzzo. How's the demon reporter? How the devil do you ever hold a job drenched all the time and dressed like a bum?"

The other said, "I seldom do Little Ed. Seldom do, you old clothes horse. Dave, how about another Mule? On the cuff, of course, of course."

Dave Zeiss said, "Mr. De Kemp, you've already got so much scribbled on the cuff it's clear up to the elbow."

"Listen to that," the newcomer

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complained to Ed Wonder. "All a good drinking man needs is a bartender to make jollies at him. I'm this gin mill's best customer. Always settle up as soon as I get a paycheck. And what does he give me when my tongue is hanging out like a red necktie? He makes with a funny. Is it my fault I'm a poor manager of money? I'm the only guy I know who can enter a revolving door and come out the opposite side three dollars poorer."

Dave said wearily, "Mr. De Kemp, you're the best customer of every bar in Kingsburg. Not just this one." He began going off for the copper mug and ingredients to do up a Moscow Mule.

Ed said, screwing up his nose, "What do they make your cigars out of, rolled up army blankets?"

De Kemp took the object in question from his mouth and looked at it fondly. "This isn't a cigar, it's a stogie. When I was a kid I saw Tyrone Power playing a Mississippi gambler and smoking stogies. Never forgot it. A great Mississippi steamboat gambler was lost in me, Little Ed. I've got the soul for it. It's a damn shame the side-paddle river boat ever went out."

Ed caught a glimpse of Helen returning to him and swiveled on his stool to help her to a place. Then his eyes bugged. He opened his mouth, couldn't think of anything to say and closed it again.

Buzz De Kemp, his back to Helen so that he hadn't seen her coming up, said, "Little Ed, what's this gaff I hear about you sucking up to some rich society bitch? Somebody said you were trying to marry the boss's daughter. You getting tired of working chum? She hasn't got a friend, has she?"

Ed Wonder closed his eyes in mute agony.

Helen looked her aristocratic look down her straight nose at the reporter. "What is this?" she said to Ed, not, "Who is this?"

Ed groaned. "Miss Fontaine, may I present Buzz De Kemp, of the *Times-Tribune*. That is, if he's still got the job. Buzz — Helen."

Buzz shook his head. "Phooey. You can't be Helen Fontaine. Big glamour girl type. All jigged up hair styles, makeup that takes a couple of hours to plaster on. I've seen pictures of Helen . . ."

Helen turned to Ed, almost defensively. She said, "I washed my face and combed out my hair, just to get more comfortable. It must have been filthy in that tent. I absolutely *itched*." She took up the pony of Travarica and tossed it back, stiff-wristed.

Buzz said approvingly, "Well, you drink like I've heard Helen Fontaine does."

Ed Wonder couldn't keep from staring at her, even as he made motions to Dave for a refill. He said, "Listen, Helen, you didn't take that old duffer's sounding off seriously, did you?"

"Don't be silly," she said, watching the bartender fill her glass again. "It was simply dirty in that tent— I suppose."

Buzz had pushed his own mug over to Dave as though Ed Wonder's order had included him as well. Now

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he said, "What's everybody talking about? What tent?"

Ed said impatiently, "Helen and I went to a supposed revival meeting. Some off-beat crank named Ezekiel Joshua Tubber."

"Oh, Tubber," Buzz said. "I wanted to do up a couple of articles about him but the city editor said nobody was interested in new religious cults."

Helen looked at him, as though for the first time. "You've been to his meetings?"

"That's right. I've got a phobia for off-beat political economy theories. Regular phobia."

In spite of the fact that she had downed two stiff brandies, Ed decided Helen seemed more nearly sober than she had earlier. To keep the conversation going along the present path, in wishful prayer that it would never get back to Buzz's crack about trying to marry the boss's daughter, Ed said, "Political economy? He's supposed to be a religious twitch, not an economist."

Buzz took a long pull at the Moscow Mule before answering. He put the mug down and pointed at Ed with his stogie. "Where religion lets off and socio-economics begins can be a moot question, Little Ed. You'll find most of the world's religions have a foundation in the economic system of their time. Take Judaism. When Moses laid down those laws of his, chum, they covered every aspect of the nomad life of the Jews. Property relationship, treatment of slaves, treatment of servants and employees, money questions. The works. Same thing with Mohammedanism."

Ed said, "That was a long time ago."

Buzz grinned at him and stuck the stogie back in his mouth. He said around it, "Want a more recent example? Take Father Divine. Ever heard of his movement? It started back in the big depression, and, believe me, if the Second War hadn't come along Father Divine's so-called religion might have swept the country. Cause why? Cause it was basically a socio-economic movement. It fed people at a time when a lot were going hungry. It was sort of a primitive communism. Everybody tossed everything he had into the common kitty. If you didn't have anything to toss, that was okay too, you were still welcome. And then everybody worked, fixing up the delapidated old mansions they bought into what they called heavens. Those who could, got jobs on the outside as maids, chauffeurs, cooks or whatever, and the cash they brought in went into the kitty too. When a heaven saved up enough money and when enough new converts came along, they bought another old mansion and fixed up another heaven. Oh, it was going great guns until the war came along and things boomed and everybody hurried off to make a hundred dollars a week welding in the shipyards."

Helen said, "What you say might apply to Father Divine and the Mohammedans, but not all religions are, well, economic."

Buzz De Kemp looked at her.

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"That's not exactly the way I put it. But, anyway, name one."

"Don't be silly. Christianity."

Buzz threw back his head and laughed. He ground his stogie out. "Who was it said that if Christianity hadn't come along when it did, it would have been to the advantage of the Romans to invent it? And maybe they did."

"Why, you're insane. The Romans persecuted the Christians. Anybody knows that who's read anything at all about history."

"At first they persecuted them, but they made it the State religion after catching on to the fact that it was the perfect religion for a slave society. It promised pie in the sky when you died. Suffer on earth, and you get your just dessert after death. What could be a better creed to keep an exploited population quiet?"

Ed Wonder said morosely, "This is getting to be a swell evening. Ten minutes ago I thought both of you had an edge on. Now we're arguing politics and religion. What do you say we amble on, Helen? There's still time to take in a show. I've got a couple of tickets to . . ."

Helen was saying heatedly, "You sound like an atheist!"

The reporter did a burlesque bow. "An agnostic with atheistic tendencies." He grunted ruefully. "Actually, I can't make any claims to intellectual superiority. My mother came from a long-time family of agnostics, and my father, though born a Seventh Day Adventist became one of those street corner atheists. You know, great for cornering some poor sincere Baptist and demanding if Adam and Eve were the only people in the world, who did Cain marry? So I was raised in an atmosphere that lacked belief in any organized religion. I became an agnostic for the same reason you became a Methodist or Presbyterian . . ."

"I'm an Episcopalian!" she snapped, not placated by his wry self-deprecation.

"Like your parents? And suppose a trick of fate had you born into a Moslem family? Or a Shintoist one. What do you think you'd be? Nope. Miss Fontaine — you really are Helen Fontaine, eh? — I am afraid we both lack originality."

"Well, anyway that doesn't apply to me," Ed said. "My people were both Baptists and I switched to Episcopalian."

Buzz De Kemp grunted. "You know, Little Ed, I suspect that under that fawning, pyramid-climbing exterior which you present to the world, beats a heart of pure brass. Let's face up to cruel reality. You're an opportunist. It's all the thing to be an Episcopalian."

IV

Ed Wonder awoke from no deep dream of peace and groaned the words that had to be said to register with the voco-alarm and turn it off. The action brought back to mind that he was going to have to check his credit balance. The Volkshover wasn't paid for yet, not to speak of this far out TV-stereo-radio - phono - tape - recorder - alarm-clock built into his apartment wall.

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He swung his legs over the side of the bed and scratched his wisp of a moustache. What had he been drinking? He had started with Martinis. Martinis at Helen's house. Then he'd had a couple of highballs at the *Saloon* with Buzzo De Kemp, while Helen and the newspaperman argued about religion and politics and whether or not atheists were ipso facto subversives. Helen was damned near as conservative as her old man. Where had they gone after the *Saloon*?

He moaned gently as he came to his feet and started for the bathroom. He stared into the mirror. Thirty-three years. When did you start getting middle aged? Maybe at forty. You couldn't exactly call yourself young any more at forty. He looked into his face for wrinkles, realizing he'd been doing that more often recently. He didn't have any wrinkles to speak of. And that merest touch of gray at his temples was to the plus. Gave him some dignity. That was one of the advantages of a roundish face, slightly on the plump side. The wrinkles didn't show like they did on a thin, long face.

He skinned back his lips so he could see his teeth. That was one of his unsolved problems, whether or not to have his lower front teeth straightened a bit for TV appearance. But then, there was such a thing as too perfect teeth. The twitches tuned in figured they were false.

And how about his moustache? Should he shave it off completely or let it grow heavier? He was presently wearing a thin line of a moustache currently popular among the bright young executive types. The trouble was, a thin moustache made him look like a stereotype Parisian gigolo. He probably wasn't suited for a moustache at all, he decided gloomily. A moustache went with a face that had quite a space between the upper lip and the nose.

If he ever got the program on TV and off this kooky late-hour radio arrangement, he'd have to settle about both teeth and moustache. You can't go switching your appearance once you get to be a TV personality. The viewers get used to the way you look and they want you to continue looking that way. They don't have brains enough to put up with switches. It irritates them.

He opened the jar of *No-Shav* depilatory and began spreading it over his right cheek, rubbing it in well. Quite a few of the boys in TV had resorted to having their beards permanently removed. You couldn't take chances on your public image. What was the name of that presidential candidate, way back, who supposedly lost the election because on camera he looked like he hadn't shaved? The idea made Ed Wonder uncomfortable. Removing the hair from his face each morning was an act of masculinity. Had a way of making you feel, well, like a man. However, you couldn't take chances with your public image. You couldn't afford to look like a hooligan if you got your program onto TV.

The question of his credit balance came up again. Trying to keep up to Helen's pace was getting to him.

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He wished he had the gumption to ask her to marry him. He had an unhappy suspicion that the idea would fracture her. But he had to do it sooner or later. The son-in-law of Jensen Fontaine. Holy smokes.

Maybe he should have asked her last night. She was tight there for awhile. And at one time, depressed. He'd never seen her before with her hair combed down straight and her face completely free of makeup. Come to think of it, she had a certain wistful appeal, looking that way. He had to laugh inwardly. That old coot, what was his name? Tubber. Ezekiel Joshua Tubber. He had something with that able-to-swell personality of his. He'd evidently set Helen back with that cursing vanity, or whatever it was he had cursed.

Ed reached for a towel to wipe away the *No-Shav*.

Ed Wonder parked his little hover car in the Fontaine Building's cellar parking area and made his way to the elevators. He wasn't late. Today he did a few commercials and some announcing for routine programs, but that was later. Largely he used his time for getting material for his show after next, and he hadn't any clock to punch. However, it was later than usual and there was only one fellow passenger in the elevator, a dowdily dressed, plain-faced young woman. She evidently didn't care much about her appearance. Ed wondered vaguely who she worked for and who, in the swank Fontaine Building, would put up with such a drab.

It was none of his business. He didn't bother to wait for her to call her floor first. He said, "Twentieth," and the auto-operator said, "Twentieth, yes sir." The girl called her own floor, in a throaty slur of a voice that vibrated warm sex.

Ed Wonder looked at her with slightly more interest. With a voice like that, she belonged on the air. He took in her features. Why any beautician could go to town on that face. You could . . .

He pulled himself up, startled.

He said, "Oh. Pardon me. I didn't recognize you, Miss Malone. I didn't even know that you were in Kingsburg."

She took him in, disinterestedly. "Hello, uhh, Little Ed, isn't it?"

"That's right," he told her eagerly. "I caught your network program Monday night. Real sharpy."

"Thanks, Little Ed. I came up for a special program. What are you doing these days? I don't believe I've seen you since you helped with the commercials on the — let's see . . ."

"The Sophisticated Heure show," Ed reminded her, wagging his tail at the recognition. "I've got my own program now."

Her eyebrows went up and she tried to project interest. "Really? How nice. Well, I'm afraid this is my floor."

When she was gone, he scowled in perplexity. Then his face cleared. She was incognito. That was the way to handle avoiding the fans. Why even he hadn't recognized her. When he had a name like Mary Malone's, maybe he'd have to figure out ways to keep his public off too.

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He strolled down the corridor to his desk, his mind on the program to come. He'd had a letter from a swami, or yoga, or whatever he was, that might be a lead. He hadn't had any Hindus on the show for some time. Indians went over pretty well. They *sounded* authentic. He noted vaguely that someone else was sitting at Dolly's desk. Maybe the girl was ill. That'd be a pain. Dolly was his part-time assistant, his program not calling for a full secretary. She did most of the drudgery, and had been with him since he'd first got Mulligan's okay for his off-beat show.

Ed Wonder pulled up before her desk and began to inquire who this newcomer was, then shut his mouth with an audible pop.

He opened it again to say, "What in the name of Mountain Moving Mohammed are you doing in this get-up?"

Dolly said defensively, "What's wrong with it?"

"You look like a country hick."

She flushed. "I don't think I have to take that from you, Little Ed Wonder. I'm clean. I'm neat. And how I dress doesn't affect the work I do."

"Well, you're my front. Suppose somebody came in? Maybe a potential sponsor. Possibly a potential guest. What does he think? You don't see the other girls . . ." He swept his eyes around the extensive office, as though in indication, and came to an abrupt halt.

Dolly eyed him in superiority.

He blurted, "What in the devil's got into all you dames? I just saw Mary Malone in the elevator. She looked like she was in costume to play Little Nell, down on the farm."

Dolly said primly, "Mr. Mulligan said for you to see him as soon as you came in."

Still letting his eyes go round the office, from one to the next of some dozen of secretaries and stenographers, in utter disbelief, Ed made his way to his immediate boss's sanctum.

He'd carried out his assignment to cover Tubber's meeting hadn't he? Fatso Mulligan should have been on the grateful side. He should have been, well, genial.

Instead, he sat there like a lard Buddha and gave Ed Wonder the oatmeal look.

Ed cleared his throat and said, "You wanted to see me, Mr. Mulligan?"

The older man half closed one eye, which didn't go very far toward dimming the intensity of the glare. "See here, Wonder, what was the lame-brained idea of taking Miss Fontaine to that kooky meeting last night?"

Ed Wonder looked at him. He opened his mouth, closed it again. He could think of something to say, but there was discretion to consider.

Mulligan rapped, "Miss Fontaine is a high-strung young lady. Very susceptible to suggestion. Uh, delicate."

Helen Fontaine was about as delicate as a hydrofluoric rubdown. And the only suggestion to which Ed had ever found her susceptible to was another drink. So far as being high strung was concerned,

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there had been times when Ed Wonder might have been willing to participate in a lynching bee with Miss Helen Beauregard Fontaine as guest of honor.

So he had nothing to say in reply to that, either.

The TV-radio executive growled, "Well, don't stand there shuffling around like a kid that has to go to the rest room. What'da got to say?"

Ed had to say, "What's happened, Mr. Mulligan?"

"What's happened? How the hell would I know what's happened? Mr. Fontaine's had me over the coals for the past ten minutes. The girl's hysterical. She says this Tubber guy you took her to see hypnotized her, or something."

Ed shook his head. He took a breath. "She's not hypnotized."

"How do you know she's not hypnotized? She's hysterical, keeps screaming about this Tubber."

Ed said placatingly, "I've had several hypnotists on the program. In order to straight man for them, I had to cram up on the subject. I was there last night. Believe me, Tubber didn't hypnotize anybody."

Mulligan made movements of his mouth as though checking his dentures with his tongue. It came to Ed Wonder that it was just as well that his chief never appeared before camera.

He said finally, "You better get over there and see what you can do. Mr. Fontaine isn't happy about this Tubber character. We're having a meeting of the chapter tonight. You'd better be there to give a report on what happened."

"Yes, sir. I'll go right on over to the Fontaine's. She'll probably snap out of it." He didn't bother to add that he suspected it was more apt to be delirium tremens than anything else.

V

Jensen Fontaine himself met Ed Wonder at the door of the Fontaine mansion. He had evidently been watching the progress of Ed's Volkshover up the sweep of driveway that culminated in the grandiose entry which vaguely reminded the radioman of the White House.

Actually, he had met Helen's father a couple of times before but only glancingly. Ed doubted that he was remembered. Evidently the tycoon had long since given up trying to channel his daughter's life. Certainly he made no effort to censor her escorts.

He bent a grim eye on Ed Wonder now as the radioman ascended the stairs to the double doors, one of which was open. It was a day for grim eyes, Ed decided unhappily. For a long time he had been trying to get next to Jensen Fontaine through his contact with Helen. This wasn't exactly it.

The older man rapped, "You're this Edward Wonder?"

"Yes, sir. I have the Far Out Hour from midnight to one."

"You have *what*?"

Ed said unhappily, "On your radio and TV station, sir, WAN-TV. I have the Friday night program on radio from midnight to one o'clock."

"Radio?" Fontaine rasped indig-

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nantly. "Do you mean to tell me that ass Mulligan still continues *radio* programs in this day? What's wrong with television?"

Ed had a strong desire to close his eyes in suffering. However, he said, "Yes, sir. Nothing's wrong with TV. In fact, I wish we could switch my program over. But there's some people who can't look at television."

"Can't look at television? Why not! TV has become the American way of life! What kind of people can't enjoy television? Perhaps this should be looked into, young man!"

"Yes, sir. Well, blind people for one and . . ."

Jensen Fontaine's eye went bleaker still.

"... and, well, people who are working and can't sit down to watch a screen. People who are driving cars manually. There's lots of people who still listen to radio when they can't watch TV. I get a lot of truck drivers who listen to my program. And waitresses in all-night restaurants. And . . ."

The elderly tycoon blurted, "I don't know how in the confounded blasted blazes we got onto this. You're the young fool who took my daughter to this ridiculous religious quack's meeting last night?"

"Yes, sir. Yes, I was. I mean did, that is. The question came up whether or not this Ezekiel Joshua Tubber . . ."

"*Who*?"

"Yes, sir. Ezekiel Joshua Tubber."

"Don't be an ass. Nobody has a name like that in this day. It's a pseudonym, young man. And a man who needs a pseudonym is covering something. Probably something subversive."

"Yes, sir. That's the question that came up at the last meeting of the local chapter of the Stephen Decatur Society; whether or not this Tubber was subversive. So Helen, that is, Miss Fontaine, and I went to attend."

Some of the bleakness was gone. Jensen said, "Ummm, the society, eh? *My country may she always be right . . .*"

"*But my country, right or . . . ah . . . wrong?*" Ed clipped right back.

"Excellent, my boy. I wasn't at the last meeting, Ed. I'll call you Ed. Busy off at the convention in California. This Tubber is a subversive, eh? What's he pulled on my daughter, Ed? We'll get to the bottom of this." He took Ed Wonder by the arm and led him inside.

"Well, no sir," Ed told him. "At least it didn't seem so to me. I'm supposed to make a report to the chapter tonight. Mr. Mulligan arranged it."

"Hump. Sounds like a subversive to me. What did he do to Helen?"

"I wouldn't know, sir. I came over to see her, I'd think she's just upset. She had a bit of fun last night. Heckled Tubber a little and he got sore and cursed her."

"You mean this charlatan, this, this subversive with the unknown name, actually swore at my daughter!" The glare was back.

"Well, no sir. What I meant was he laid a curse on her. You know, a hex. A spell."

Jensen dropped Ed Wonder's arm

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and stared at him for a long appraising moment.

Ed said, finally, "Yes, sir." There wasn't anything else to say.

Jensen Fontaine said, "Come with me, young man." He led the way to a staircase and ascended it, wordlessly. He led the way down a hall, wordlessly. Around a corner, past a half dozen doors, wordlessly. He opened a door and preceded Ed Wonder through it.

Helen was still in bed, her hair every which way on the pillow, her face pale, and her eyes on the wild side. There were two medical-looking coves and a nurse starched Prussian stiff in attendance.

Jensen Fontaine blurted, "Out!"

One of the doctors said smoothly, "I would suggest, Mr. Fontaine, that your daughter be given a long rest and complete change of scene. Her hysteria is . . ."

"Out. All of you," Fontaine snapped, tossing his head at the trio of medicos.

Three sets of eyebrows went up, but all had evidently had contact with the Fontaine personality before. They gathered up odds and ends and beat a retreat.

Helen said, "Hello, Little Ed."

Ed Wonder opened his mouth but before even greetings came forth, Jensen Fontaine's blast chopped him to silence.

"Helen!"

"Yes, Daddy . . ."

"You get out of that bed. Suppose the newspapers got this. A curse. A hex! My daughter with the best diagnosticians and psychiatrists in Ultra-New York in attendance because she's been hexed. Get out of that bed. What would this do to my name? What would it do to the society if the word went out that prominent members believed in witches?"

He spun violently, glared at Ed Wonder, for some unknown reason, and charged out of the room as though on the way to storm Little Round Top.

Ed looked after him. "How can a man who can't weigh more than a hundred pounds make that much noise?" he said. He looked down at Helen. "What in the devil's wrong?"

"I itch. Not right now. Like an allergy, or something."

He looked at her for a long moment, as though he had put a dime in a slot machine and nothing had come out.

Finally he said, "When do you itch?"

"If I put on makeup. Even the slightest touch of lipstick. Or if I do up my hair any way except combed straight down to my shoulders, or done in braids. Or if I put on anything except the simplest clothes I've got. No silk. Not even in my underthings. I simply start itching. It started really last night, but I didn't realize it. Little Ed, I'm scared. It works. That old goat's curse is working on me."

Ed Wonder stared down at her. "Don't be a twitch."

She stared back at him, defiantly.

He had never seen Helen Fontaine before, save last night, in the dimness of the *Saloon*, in other than the highest of highest, fashionwise.

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Every pore in place. It came to him now that she possibly looked better this way. Possibly when she got to be the age of Mary Malone, the screen and TV star, she'd need civilization's contributions to aid nature's gifts. But in her mid-twenties . . .

Helen said, "You were there."

"Sure I was there. So old Tubber waved his arms around a little, got red in the face and slapped a hex on you. And you believed him."

"I believed him because it worked," she flared back.

"Don't be a kook, Helen! Curses don't work unless the person who has one laid on him believes it will work. Anybody knows that."

"Fine! But in this case it worked without my believing in it. Do you think I believe in curses?"

"Yes."

"Well, maybe I do now. But I didn't then. And let me tell you something else, Little Ed Wonder. That chubby daughter of his, and those followers in the audience. They believe in the *power*, as they call it, too. They've seen him do it before. Remember how scared his daughter was when she heard him speaking in wrath?"

"They're a bunch of twitches."

"All right, all right. Go on. Get out. I'm getting up and getting dressed. But I'm going to dress in the simplest things I've got, understand?"

"I'll see you later," Ed told her, not doing very well at keeping disgust from his voice.

"The later the better," she snapped back.

He had to get hopping on this program for the Friday after next. It didn't do to get too near the deadline. This coming Friday he had a telepath lined up. A girl who had made some extraordinary runs with the Zener cards at a couple of the universities where they were conducting *ESP* tests. Telepathy was one of the few far out bits that Ed Wonder was inclined to buy. There was just too much accumulated evidence to brush it off.

On his way past Dolly's desk to his own he said to her, "Get me Jim Westbrook. And put a little snap into it, eh?"

"Who?" Dolly said. He still couldn't get used to her well-scrubbed face and her cotton print, not to speak of the Little Dutch girl hairdo.

"Jim Westbrook. We've had him on the program several times. He's in the book as James Westbrook."

He sat down at his desk and fumbled his key into the top drawer. Something was nagging him about Dolly's down-on-the-farm get up, but he couldn't put his finger on it. Something that should be very obvious, but didn't come through. He shook his head to switch subjects brought forth the letter from the swami. He scanned it again. Confound it, this was the sort of character he could really project over TV. His program demanded TV. Half the kooks he had on as guests needed to be seen to be appreciated.

The phone buzzed and he picked it up.

It said, "Little Ed? Jim Westbrook here."

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"Yeah, hi Jim. Listen, I've got this Hindu twitch who calls himself Swami Respa Rammal. Claims he can walk on burning coals. Is there any chance he can?"

Over the phone Jim Westbrook said slowly, "With a name like that, friend, he sounds like a phony. A respa is a sort of Tibetan neophyte lama who indures fantastic cold as part of his training for full lamahood. And Rammal is a Moslem name, rather than Hindu. And he wouldn't call himself a swami, either. That's the wrong word. A swami is simply a Hindu religious teacher. Comes from the sanskrit word *svamin*, meaning master."

"All right, all right," Ed Wonder said. "Phony name or not, is it possible that he can walk on burning coals?"

"It's been done, friend."

Ed was incredulous. "At 800 degree Fahrenheit?"

"That's a little better than the melting point of steel," Jim told him, "but it's been done."

"*When*, and by whom?"

"Well, right off hand I can't reel off names and dates but there're two types of this fire walking. The first takes place over coals and embers and the second over hot stones. The Hindus do it and so do various cults in the South Seas. For that matter, every year in Northern Greece and Southern Bulgaria they have a day on which they traditionally walk on hot coals. The British Society for Psychical Research and the London Council for Psychical Investigation both looked into it, witnessed it, and even had some of their members try it. Some succeeded . . ."

"And . . ." Ed prompted.

"Some burned the hell out of their feet."

Ed thought about it. He said finally, "Look Jim, do you know anybody with some nice scientific-sounding handle who disagrees with you? Suppose we made this a four-way panel. Me, the swami, you, who agrees it can be done, and this scientist who claims it can't. Possibly we can stretch it over two programs. The first one we'll interview the swami and argue it around. Then during the next week we'll have him perform, and we'll report on the experiment the following program."

Jim Westbrook said, "Come to think of it, I had an argument with Manny Levy a year or two back on the very subject."

"Who?"

"Doctor Manfred Levy, down in Ultra-New York. He's a big wig in popularization of science, several books to his credit. On top of that, he's got a German accent you could chin yourself on. Makes him sound very scientific."

Ed said, "Do you think you could get him to act as a panelist?"

"Sure we could get him — at your top rates."

"Not for free, eh? Not just for the fun of it? My budget's running low for this quarter."

Jim Westbrook laughed. "You don't know Manny, friend."

Ed sighed. "Okay, Jim. Get in touch with him, will you? And let me know soonest what he says."

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He switched off the phone, switched on the dicto and did a letter to Swami Respa Rammal. Whether or not they could get this Doctor Levy on the panel, he decided to use the fire walker. A fire walker, yet. Sometimes he wondered how he'd ever gotten into this line. Once he'd wanted to be an actor. It took him some ten years to find out he wasn't. Deep within, Ed Wonder divided the world into two groups, those who gawked and listened, the twitches, and those who performed. He couldn't stand not being one of the performers.

He got up and wandered over to the coke dispenser, not actually thirsty. On the way he stopped at the news teleprinter and let his eyes scan the last few dispatches. El Hassan was uniting North Africa, largely in spite of itself. The Soviet Complex was having interior rumblings again. The Hungarians were slowly replacing the Russians in the higher echelons of the party.

The teleprinter chattered and he took in the latest item.

A new fashion seems to be sweeping the nation . . . No makeup, no frills . . . Simplicity is the keynote . . . Robert Hope the third, TV comedian, has already tagged it the Homespun Look . . .

Ed Wonder grunted. So that's why Dolly and the rest of the office staff had come to work looking like the hired girl all set to do the milking. The way these fads could spread. It was bad enough in the old days. Hems up, hems down; hair up, hair down, pony tails, wigs, short, long, and what not; bosoms are *in* this season, bosoms are out. It had been bad enough but now with universal television, the welfare state and the affluent society, a fad could sweep the country overnight. The proof was in the fact that this one evidently had. That explained Mary Malone's appearance in the elevator, too. Trust Mary Malone to be in there at the beginning.

However, he again had that premonition. He couldn't quite put his finger on something he ought to remember. He shrugged and continued on toward the coke dispenser.

As he stood there, drinking from his paper cup, he contemplated the machine. Just how far would the efficiency engineers finally go? The beverage was free. The time and motion people had figured out that it was cheaper to contribute free cold drinks than to have the office help waste the time they did in trotting around getting change, or borrowing a dime each time they wanted refreshing.

Mulligan waddled from his office and cast his eyes around the room, spotted Ed and started toward him.

The luck of the Irish. Why couldn't he have been seated at his desk in a rash of hard work when Fatso issued onto the scene?

However, the studio head evidently wasn't in his usual critical mood. He rumbled, almost pleasantly, "All set, Little Ed?"

Ed looked at him blankly.

"The chapter meeting," Mulligan blatted. "Your report on this subversive religious kook."

Ed said brightly, "Oh, sure, Mr. Mulligan. All set to go." Actually,

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he hadn't given a thought to this. He should have spent some time on it. Old man Fontaine would be there and probably half the local business bigwigs. It was a chance to make an impression. To make contacts.

VI

The meeting of the local chapter of the Stephen Decatur Society took place in one of the conference rooms of Coy Perfume, Incorporated. Ed Wonder hadn't known that Wannamaker Doolittle, president of Coy, was a member of the society. Here was a contact, right off the bat. Coy perfumes were one of the big sponsors in Kingsburg.

His luck again. There wasn't going to be a spell, before the meeting got under way, during which he could meet the big shots present. The meeting was already under way. In fact, he and Mulligan attracted the scowls of several present, including Jensen Fontaine, who was prominently seated at the far end of the table around which some thirty chapter members were gathered.

They slunk into two unoccupied seats, not adjoining each other.

It was Wannamaker Doolittle himself who held the floor. He was waving a newspaper and viewing something with alarm, as best Ed could make out.

"Listen to this," the Coy head demanded. "Listen to this undermining of American institutions." He read, accusation in his high voice:

"Planned obsolescence through style fluctuation can present one of the most unbelievable elements of our unbelievable economy. As good an example as any are the twice a year changes in Detroit's autohovers. Last year, General Ford autohovers managed to get about in the night with but four lights, two forward, two behind. This year they carry fourteen outside lights, fore, aft and to the sides. Evidently, the autohover stylists couldn't get together on just what all these banks of lights were for. On some, the tail lights were dummies, not hooked up to the wiring system. A similar example is to be found in the latest kitchen stoves. In the attempt to put over to the housewife consumer that her present stove is antiquated, latest models are so gimmicked up with control panels that they look like the conning tower of an atomic submarine. They carry as many as thirty-five buttons and dials. On dismantling one of these the Consumer's Alliance found that many of the dials had no connections beneath the cover. They were dummies.'"

Wannamaker Doolittle looked up in accusation. He banged the newspaper he held in his left hand with the back of his right. "Commie subversion," he bleated. "Insidious underground attempt to undermine our institutions."

"Hear, hear," someone applauded, thumping on the table. There were general murmurs of indignation.

"Who is this Buzz De Kemp?" Doolittle demanded. "Do our newspapers hire any subversive who comes along claiming to be an honest journalist? Is there no screening? No check on his security rat-

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ing?" He slapped the paper again. "What editor passes such open attacks upon two of the most important elements in our economy, autohovers and kitchen appliances? Last week the president exhorted the people to buy, buy, buy, in order to continue our prosperity. How can we expect full consumption of our products if women slave away over antiquated stoves, and if families drive rattling, unstylish autohovers, fully a year old?"

Ed Wonder's ears had picked up at the mention of Buzz De Kemp's name. Buzzo must be slipping his gears to write things like that. Did he want to get a reputation as a kook?

Jensen Fontaine, evidently the chairman, banged the table with his gavel. "A motion is in order to recommend to the publisher of the *Times-Tribune* that this malcontent reporter, uh, whatever his name is . . ."

"Buzz De Kemp," Ed said, without thinking.

Eyes went to Ed Wonder, whose tie suddenly became overly tight.

"You know this obvious communist?" Jensen Fontaine rapped.

"Well, yes sir. I've run into him several times. He's not a commie. According to him he just sort of makes a hobby of off beat politico-economic theories. You know . . ." His sentence dribbled away as he saw his words weren't exactly making a big hit.

Someone said darkly, "You can't play with tar without getting your hands dirty."

Fontaine banged the table again. "Do I hear a motion?"

Mulligan got out quickly, "Make a motion that a committee composed of members who advertise in the *Times-Tribune* draw up a letter to the publisher complaining of the reddish-tinged articles of this De Kemp guy."

Somebody said, "Second."

The business was wrapped up handily. Ed Wonder decided that Dave Zeiss, over at the *Saloon*, was going to have to wait another spell before getting out from under Buzz's tab.

There was a long-winded report then by some sort of library committee. Evidently they were having trouble with the children's section in the town's library. Something about refusing to ban *Robin Hood* from the shelves.

Ed Wonder looked suddenly alert. Jensen Fontaine had just used his name.

Helen's father was saying, "During my absence I understand we had several letters concerning the subversive element in the so-called sermons of a certain . . ." he looked down at the paper before him and snorted disbelief, ". . . Ezekiel Joshua Tubber. Member Helen Fontaine, my daughter, and a staff member of WAN-TV attended a Tubber revival and as a result Helen was confined for a time to her bed. Mr. Edward Wonder will now report fully."

Ed stood up. Already he wasn't liking this and had an unhappy suspicion that he wasn't going to win kudos.

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Ed said, "The fact is, I'm no authority on underground subversion. I know it's important work. Keeping the country from being overthrown by the commies and all. But, well, I've got my nose to the grindstone at WAN-TV. Possibly some of you folks have tuned in to the Far Out Hour on Friday nights . . "

Mulligan said ominously. "The report on Tubber, Little Ed, the report on Tubber. No commercials."

Ed cleared his throat. "Yes, sir. Well, frankly, from what I heard, Tubber is anti-communist, rather than a commie. At least that's what he says. He complained about people being too materialistic, concentrating on the things they own or consume, instead of spiritual things . . . I suppose."

Somebody said, "My minister gives the same sermon every Sunday. On Monday we forget it."

Somebody else said, "Oh, he does, does he? This is something I've been wanting to bring up. What's wrong with our consumer society? What would happen to our economy if we listened to these supposed religious leaders?"

Fontaine banged his gavel. "Go on," he said to Ed Wonder. He didn't sound too happy about the way the report was coming, so far. Which, in turn, didn't make Ed any too happy either.

"Well, all I can say is that he didn't sound like a commie. In fact, Helen, Miss Fontaine, asked him a direct question about it and he made it clear that he wasn't."

The woman who had reported on the library said, mystified, "But what's all this got to do with Helen being under a doctor's care? What did he *do* to her?"

Ed looked in anguish at Jensen Fontaine who at first began to say something but then closed his mouth to a line so thin Ed Wonder decided you'd have your work cut out getting a knife blade between the lips.

Ed said, "Well, Miss Fontaine was, ah, kind of heckling him. And he got sore and, well, cursed her."

There was a silence. They'd made the same assumption Fontaine had earlier.

Ed cleared it up. "That is, he laid a hex on her."

Wannamaker Doolittle said, "Hex?"

"Kind of a spell," Ed said.

"What's this got to do with her being in bed?"

Ed said, unhappily, "She says she itches."

Jensen Fontaine banged his gavel. "Let's cut short all this jabber. Exactly what did this crackpot say?"

In his barren actor's years, Ed Wonder had spent considerable time in perfecting his memory. In remembering dialogue. Now he sent his mind back. He said, "It went something like this: '*Verily I curse the vainglory of women. Verily . . .*' when Tubber gets excited he slips into this fruity thee and thou language . . . '*Verily, never more wilt thou find pleasure in vanity. Truthfully never again wilt thou find pleasure in styles or in cosmetics.*"

Ed wound it up, hopefully. "That's not exactly it, but almost. So you

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see, he wasn't exactly just putting a hex on Helen. The way he worded it, actually what it amounts to is a curse on all women . . . "

He broke off in mid-sentence, because an icicle had just touched the base of his spine and was slowly working its way upward.

VII

By the next morning, there was little doubt left in Ed Wonder's mind. He scanned the teleprinter's bulletins. It wasn't a nationwide fad, it was a worldwide fad. Common Europe, the Soviet Complex, and the aborigines of the Galapagos Islands, for that matter, were all affected.

Fads there had been before. Every type of fad. People went for fads these days. The hula hoop and the Davy Crockett craze of an earlier decade were as nothing to today's fads. As watching TV replaced working as the daily occupation of the average citizen, the slight tendency to rebel against complete ossification seated in one's living room was taken up by the new tri-di cinema, which at least made you walk as far as the neighborhood theatre, and by fads, fads, fads.

Fads in food, fads in dress, fads in slang, fads in everything. It was one method by which the obsolescence by style manipulators kept their goods rolling. If convertibles were in, then sedans were out, and only a twitch, a kook, would be seen dead in one. If tweeds were in, gabardines were out, and you might as well throw yesterday's suit into the disposal chute. If Chinese food came in, Italian, Turkish, Russian, Scottish, or whatever had been the fad last month, went out. And a restaurant which had optimistically stocked its shelves and freezers with products for yesterday's fad, might as well dump them in the garbage.

Yes, fads there had been before, but never like this.

Ultimately, almost any fad originating in the West, would spread to even the Soviet Complex. Did Battle Fatigue cocktails become the thing in Greater Washington, three months later they were being used to toast the health of Number One in the Kremlin. Did Bermuda shorts in Madras cloth become the rage for formal dress in Ultra-New York, they were adorning the thin limbs of the Chinaman in the streets of Peking within a matter of weeks.

But at least it took *weeks*.

So far as Ed Wonder could figure out, this current Homespun Look fad had hit the world simultaneously. The data he could uncover bore that out to his satisfaction. Possibly no one else realized it, but Ed Wonder did.

It had hit Saturday night at eight thirty-five local time. From all he could piece together, from confused news reports, it had hit an hour earlier, one time zone west, and had come into effect four hours later, by the clock, in England, six hours in Common Europe. And so on. In short, it didn't go by man made rules of time. It had hit simultaneously.

Some of the commentators had tried to suggest otherwise, undoubtedly in good faith. No one, as yet,

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had actually stumbled upon the truth as Ed Wonder suspected it.

He had listened to one jovial newsman who made an effort to trace the Homespun Look back several months, claiming that it had long been aborning and had suddenly blossomed forth. The same analyst pontificated on the fad. It wouldn't last. Couldn't last. It was against woman's basic human nature. It was one style that simply wouldn't have long range appeal to the fair sex. He had chuckled and revealed that the Homespun Look had already been a boon to Madison Avenue. The textile Association had quickly raised an initial hundred million to be devoted to nipping it in the bud with a gigantic TV, radio and Skyjector campaign. Cosmetic manufacturers were also supposedly in closed session to meet the emergency.

What the commentators didn't know, what nobody knew except Ed Wonder and Tubber himself, and the handful of Tubber's faithful, was that there had been no time limit set on the curse. It was slated for eternity. Always assuming that Tubber's curses, however it was that he managed them, continued their initial effectiveness.

He considered telling Mulligan about his suspicions, and decided not to.

If he started sounding off about hexes laid on by itinerent religious quacks, he'd wind up convincing people he'd been on this Far Out Hour program too long.

He wandered over to Dolly's desk. As the day before, she was in full style. By the looks of her, it must have been a dress she'd had as a teenage kid. Something in which to go out into the country, on a picnic. No lipstick, no eyebrow pencil, no powder. No earrings. No nothing.

Ed said to her, "How do you like this new Homespun Look fashion, Dolly?"

Most of the masculine element of the staff had been working the girls over in regard to their new get-up. Dolly had evidently expected Ed Wonder to head the list of tormentors, but there wasn't that in his voice.

She said, "Well, gosh, Little Ed, it's just like any other style. It comes in, pretty soon it will go out. I don't especially either like it or dislike it."

He said, his voice low, "Listen, have you tried putting on makeup at all these last couple of days?"

She frowned, puzzlement there. "Well . . . yes, a couple of times."

"And?"

She hesitated, her pert nose wrinkled. "Well, darn it, I felt *itchy*. You know, something like when you've had a bad sunburn and the skin starts peeling off."

Ed Wonder shook his head. He said, "Listen, Dolly, get me Buzz De Kemp, over on the *Times-Tribune*, will you? That is, if he's still at the *Times-Tribune*. I've got to talk to somebody."

She bent on him the strange look he deserved and went about the chore. Ed Wonder went back to his own desk and took the call.

He said, "Hello, Buzzo. I didn't know if you'd still be working there or not."

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The other's voice said cheerily, "Not only here but basking in the warmth of a raise, Little Ed, old chum. It seems that some twitchy rightwing outfit put in a beef to the editor about some of my articles. Wanted me fired. So Old Ulcers says the kind of pieces that'll start enough controversy to have beefs coming in just might possibly pry a few dim-wits off their TV sets long enough to read the paper. So I got a raise."

Ed closed his eyes in sorrow at the working of the world. "All right," he said. "I've got to see you. How about Dave Zeiss's in fifteen minutes? The drinks are on me."

"You talk me into it," De Kemp said, his voice beaming. "It's a date. And I think you're beautiful, even with that queer moustache."

Ed hung up and headed for the elevator.

He had hurried his way over, but by the time he arrived the newspaperman was already two Mules up on him. The *Saloon* was practically empty. Ed went through brief amenities with Dave Zeiss, requested and got a high ball and suggested to Buzz that they retire to a booth.

Buzz leered at him, even as he got up from his stool at the bar to comply. "Have we got matters to discuss so intimate that they're not for the pink little lugs of Dave?"

"Yes."

They took places across from each other in a booth as far from the TV set and juke box as it was possible to get, and Ed looked gloomily at the reporter. He said finally, "I saw that article you did on gimmicked-up style changes."

Buzz De Kemp brought an eight inch long stogie from his jacket pocket and lit it. "Great stuff, eh? Actually . . . "

"No," Ed said, completely ignored.

" . . . the practice goes back to the early sixties, when hovers were in their infancy. You know where I got that dope? From the old boy we were talking about the other night. He's got more statistics on how our present affluent welfare state economic system is lousing up the nation . . . "

"Tubber!" Ed said.

"Sure, sure. Some of his data is dated a bit. Got a lot of it together back a decade ago. But it's even more valid now than then. The last time I heard him talk he was on the country wasting its resources with disposables. Steaks and other meats that come in disposable frying pans. Muffins and biscuits in disposable baking tins. A throw away aluminum mousetrap; you don't have to fool around with the mouse, you never even see it. You just throw away the whole unit. And plastic razors with the blade built in; use it once and throw it away." Buzz laughed and drew on his stogie.

"Listen, all this aside. I heard him sounding off the same way the night Helen and I attended his meeting. But what I want to know is, did you ever hear him lay on a spell?"

The reporter scowled at him. "Do what?"

"Make with a curse. A hex. Put a spell on somebody."

"Hey, the old boy's not crazy.

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He's just an old duck who's viewing with alarm. Warning about the deluge to come. He wouldn't really believe in curses, and even if he did, he certainly wouldn't curse anybody."

Ed finished his high ball. "Curse *anybody?* The fact is he's evidently cursed *everybody*. At least half of everybody. All women."

Buzz De Kemp took his stogie from his mouth and pointed it at Ed Wonder. "Little Ed, you're potted. Stoned. Swacked. And just plain drunk. Besides that, you don't make sense. No sense."

Ed Wonder had made up his mind to tell him. He had to tell somebody and he couldn't think of anybody better. "All right," he said. "Listen for a minute."

It took more than a minute. During the process, Buzz De Kemp had ordered another round, but otherwise didn't interrupt.

When Ed Wonder finally went silent, the newspaperman's stogie had gone out. He lit it again. He thought about it, while Ed worked away at the drink.

Buzz said finally, "It makes one beautiful story. We'll exploit it together."

"What?"

Buzz leaned over the table, pointing happily with the stogie. "It's the Father Divine story all over again. Remember me telling you about Father Divine the other night?"

"What the devil has this got . . ."

"No, listen. Back in the early thirties, Father Divine was just one more evangelist picking up a scrubby living in Harlem. He only had maybe a hundred or so followers. So one day there was a knifing or something in his heaven and the judge gave him a mild sentence. However, a couple of reporters heard several of Father Divine's followers say that the judge was flying into the face of disaster. That Father Divine would strike him dead. A day or so later the judge died of a heart attack. The reporters, seeing a story, went to interview the evangelist in his cell. He played it straight, saying simply, 'I hated to do it'. Chum, believe me, when Father Divine came out of that jail, all Harlem was there on the street waiting for him."

Ed demanded impatiently, "What in the devil . . ." Then he stopped.

"Sure," Buzz said urgently. "Don't you get it? Old Tubber curses the vanity of women. Puts a hex on cosmetics and fancy styles in clothes. That sort of thing. And what happens the next day? The Homespun Look fad hits. Coincidence, of course, but what a coincidence."

It was obvious now. "Yeah," Ed said slowly, then, "but what did you mean about us exploiting it?"

The stogie was pointing for emphasis again. "Don't be a kook. This is your chance of a lifetime. Up until now, on this off-beat program of yours you've had a bunch of freaks. Twitches who claim to have ridden in flying saucers, spiritualists who don't have any luck raising spirits for you, faith healers who couldn't take off a wart. But this time you've got it made. Go over and latch onto old man Tubber for

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your next show. He laid a hex on vanity and it worked. Get it? It *worked*. And what's more, he's got witnesses. You witnessed it, Helen Fontaine witnessed it. Tubber's daughter was there and a bunch of his followers. He's got genuine bona fide witnesses that he cursed the vanity of women and the next day the Homespun Look took over. Can't you see a story when it falls into your lap?"

"Holy smokes," Ed said in awe.

"I'll give you full coverage in the *Times-Tribune*. First build up to the program and then do a really good spread with lots of art, afterwards. Maybe in the Sunday supplement."

"Art?"

"Photographs, photographs. Of Tubber and his tent, and his daughter. Tubber in the pose he assumes when he's laying a hex on something. The works."

He was carrying Ed Wonder away. With this sort of a show he might even get enough publicity to interest some sponsor. Why, he might even get his TV spot for it.

He said, "But I've got an ESP girl on for this Friday."

"Bounce her. Postpone her. This is hot. You've got to use Tubber while this Homespun Look fad is new. It'll be old hat in a couple of weeks. This is one style that the bigwigs aren't going to let last. They can't afford to. Department stores, beauty shops, cosmetic manufacturers, are already howling. They want the President to give one of his famous Air-Conditioner-Side chats, telling the women of the country that they're destroying prosperity."

"Right!" Ed told him. "We'll do it. I'll have to get hopping. I'll need to dig up some panelists to appear with him. Ask him questions, that sort of thing."

"Me!" Buzz crowed. "I'll be a panelist for you. I've listened to him half a dozen times. Then get Helen Fontaine to appear, since it was she who brought on the hex. Maybe we can get her to plead with him to reverse the spell."

"Yeah," Ed took it up. "And his daughter, Nefertiti. She's as cute as a pair of cuff links. Nice voice too. We'll work her in. She implied that old Tubber had made with a hex or two before, when he was speaking in wrath as she called it."

VIII

Ed Wonder had the faintest twinge of misgiving on the way over to where Ezekiel Joshua Tubber had his tents pitched. What would Mulligan, and the Stephen Decatur Society have to say about opening the airwaves to the man that only the week before they were investigating for subversion? He decided he wouldn't bother to tell the studio head. If he could get Helen Fontaine to appear on the show, Mulligan wouldn't have much to say. And Buzzo was right, this was a program that was going to pull attention. The breaks, at long last, were coming Ed Wonder's way.

They drew up to the parking area of the large empty lot the Tubber followers had appropriated for his stay in the vicinity, and Ed Wonder dropped the lift lever of the Volks-

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hover and settled to the ground.

Buzz said, "Hey what's going on? What's going on?"

"It looks like they're wrapping it up." Ed said. "They're pulling down the main tent."

They scrambled out of the little hovercar and made their way in the direction of the activities.

Nefertiti Tubber spotted them first. She had emerged from the smaller of the two tents, carrying a coffeepot and four cups.

For some inane reason, there came to Ed Wonder's mind a couple of lines he hadn't thought of since high school.

Maude Miller, on a summer's day,
Raked the meadow, sweet with hay.

He said from the side of his mouth, "For the past couple of days I've been seeing this Homespun Look. For the first time I can say, on her it looks good."

"On her it looks natural," Buzz said back. "The rural simplicity bit."

She stopped and waited for them, questioning in her eyes.

Ed said, "Ah, Miss Tubber. You and your father aren't leaving?"

She cocked her head infinitestimally. "I'm afraid we are. We've been here two weeks, you know." She paused before adding, "Edward Wonder." She looked at Buzz. "Good afternoon, Buzz De Kemp. I noticed that you used material from my father's sermons in some of your articles."

"Well, yes I did."

"Without bothering to mention their source, or even that father was in town."

Buzz winced. "Well, frankly, Miss Tubber, I wanted to do some pieces on the old . . . that is, your father. But the city editor killed them. Sorry. No interest in small religious cults."

"That's why we came over to see you," Ed put in hurriedly.

She turned her incredibly blue eyes to him. "Because there is no interest in small religious cults, Edward Wonder?"

"Well, in a way. Listen, just call me Ed. What we thought is that if your father appeared on my program he'd reach hundreds of thousands of people, in their homes."

Her face brightened momentarily, but then the frown was there again.

"But your program deals with chanks, with fakes, Edward . . . that is, Ed. My father . . ."

He said hurriedly, "Not at all, Nefertiti. You don't get it. My program is designed to give people, who ordinarily wouldn't be able to reach the public, an opportunity to present their beliefs, no matter how extreme. Admittedly some are fakes, some are even crooks, but that doesn't mean that perfectly sincere folk aren't also represented. This is your father's chance to get his message over on the big time."

She said hesitantly, "Father's never been on the radio . . . Ed. I don't believe he even approves of radio. He thinks people found more enjoyment when they played their own music. When each member of the family had his own instrument, or could sing."

"When was that?" Buzz asked.

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Her eyes came to him. "It still applies in Elysium."

The newspaperman started to say something further, but Ed Wonder hurried on. "It's not important whether or not he approves of radio, or if he's ever been on. I'm used to inexperienced folk. Almost all my guests are. And this is his big chance. Besides, you'll be on too. And Buzzo, here. And, I think, Miss Fontaine."

She worried the idea a little, but then shrugged comfortably plumpish shoulders. "We can ask him." She led the way and now Ed and Buzz could see the elderly evangelist who was, with several others, pulling down the larger tent. Wooden chairs had already been folded and stacked outside.

When he spotted the two, he said something to the others who continued the work, and came over.

The old railsplitter, Ed Wonder thought all over again. Abe Lincoln in Illinois. The man had a personality. Maybe he was a father image, or something. It was a shame the program wasn't already on TV. It'd really go over if the audience could see this bird.

Ezekiel Joshua Tubber looked from one of the newcomers to the other. "Yes, dear ones?" he said.

Ed Wonder cleared his throat. "My name is . . ."

"I know your name, dear one. My daughter told me of your identity the other night."

It came to Ed very suddenly that he wasn't going to get Tubber on the show by appealing to venality. Instinctively he knew the man was no spellbinder on the make. Driving over here, with Buzz De Kemp, Ed had figured on promising the evangelist an opportunity to bring himself before the people in such ways that he would eventually make such real revivalists of the past such as Billy Sunday and Billy Graham look like pikers. Now he decided it might well be better if he made no mention of the curse at all, at this point.

Ed said, "Mr. Tubber, I . . ."

Tubber said gently, "Mister is derived from the title, Master, dear one. I wish to be no one's master, no more than I wish anyone to be mine. Call me Ezekiel, Edward."

"Or Zeke, for short," Buzz De Kemp said.

Tubber looked at the newspaperman. "Yes," he said gently. "Or Zeke, for short, if you will, dear one. It is an honorable name, that of one of the more progressive thinking of the Hebrew prophets who wrote the twenty-sixth book of the Old Testament."

"Easy, Buzzo," Ed muttered from the side of his mouth. Then to Tubber, "What I meant, sir . . ."

"The term sir, a variation of sire, comes down to us from the feudalistic era, dear one. It reflects the relationship between noble and serf. My efforts are directed against such relationships, against all authority of one man over another. For I feel that whoever puts his hand on me to govern me is a usurper and a tyrant! I declare him my enemy!"

Ed Wonder closed his eyes for a moment and held silence. He opened them again and said, "Listen, Ezekiel how would you like to appear on my radio program Friday night?"

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"I would like it very much. It is high time our mass media be utilized for dispensing other than trivialities." The bearded oldster looked wearily at the worn tent being dismantled by his assistants. "It is not through desire that my words are given to so few." His eyes came back to Ed Wonder and Buzz De Kemp. "I thank you for the opportunity to bring the word to the million mass, dear ones."

It had been as simple as that, lining up Ezekiel Joshua Tubber.

Now Helen Fontaine was another thing.

Helen Fontaine glared at the two of them. "Put myself near enough to that old goat to even hear his voice again? Oh, *Mother*. Do I look as though I've gone completely around the corner?"

They were in the so-called recreation room of the Fontaine home. Recreation, so far as the Fontaines saw it, must have consisted of drinking since the room offered little beyond an elaborate auto-bar. Ed had stationed himself behind it, dialing for the three of them, while Buzz made the pitch.

Helen was garbed in a simple cotton print. Her shoes were low of heel. Her hair, in braids. Her face looked as though it had been thoroughly scrubbed not five minutes earlier.

Buzz De Kemp moved his stogie from the left side of his mouth to the right, thoughtfully. He said, "There's nothing to be afraid of in that old boy. He's a kindly old coot, as innocent as . . ."

"A stick of dynamite," Helen put in bitterly. "Give me another beer, Little Ed."

Ed said, "I've never seen you drink beer before."

She grunted. "Neither have I, but I'm beginning to suspect that anti-vanity curse of Tubber's covers ostentatious drinks. Nothing tastes good to me any more except beer and dago red wine."

Buzz said, "Now look, you don't believe Tubber put a hex on you?"

"Yes. And I have no intention of getting near enough to him for him to dream up another one, sharpy."

Buzz said, "Okay. Grant for argument that he did, really, truly put a spell on you. If he can put it on, he can take it off, can't he?"

She frowned at him, over the rim of her beer glass. "I . . . I don't know. I suppose so."

"Why, sure," Ed put in helpfully.

Buzz said, "So fine. You'll admit he's a sweet old duffer until you get him roused up. I've never seen him roused up but I'll take the word of you two that you heckled him into a temper the other night. But basically he's a sweet old man. So fine. Come on the air with us and apologize to him and ask him to reverse the spell."

She thought about that, pulling on her beer.

"You know," she said finally. "This'll pop like corn, but I don't particularly object to this built in allergy I've got to cosmetics and fancy dress. I think I feel more, well, *comfortable* than I have since I was a child."

Buzz bore in. "Sure, fine. But how

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about all the other women in the world? Billions of them. Billions. You're young and pretty. Any style looks good on you. Even the Homespun Look. But how about all the women who don't start off with your advantages? All the rest of them are under this hex you brought on too."

Ed looked at him. "I thought you didn't believe in it?"

Buzz said, "Shut up. This is just for the sake of argument." He said to Helen, "Besides, it's Little Ed's big chance. A real blockbuster of a show. It'll get as much publicity as Orson Welles' expeditionary force from Mars back in the 1930's. But you're necessary. You're the big witness. You're the one he cursed, but in miswording it, he took in all other women as well. Little Ed needs you on the program."

Helen said decisively, "All right, I'll do it. I should have my skull candled, but I'll do it. However, I'll tell you right now, sharpy, my women's intuition tells me a wheel is going to come off this go-cart."

Buzz took his stogie from his mouth and looked at the unlit tip. "Women's intuition," he said flatly. "First we get hexes and spells and now we get women's intuition. Next week I'll meet somebody who believes in fairies."

IX

From the first, the program didn't come off exactly the way Ed Wonder and Buzz De Kemp pictured it. In fact, it didn't come off *remotely* in the manner they had pictured it.

Up until Jerry, in the control booth, signalled that the mike was hot, everything was routine. Ed Wonder had set up Studio Three for five persons, himself and four guests. There was a mike for each of them. A pad and a pencil for each, so that anyone could make notes, or doodle, or whatever. Tubber and his daughter Nefertiti had arrived a full hour before broadcast time. Helen and Buzz De Kemp came together, half an hour later, Buzz having picked up Helen at her house, afraid that she might renege at the last moment.

Ten minutes before going on, Jerry, the engineer, had taken a level on their voices. And then they had waited. When the red light had lit, signifying that the studio was hot, Ed launched into his routine. Since his program was live and off the cuff, rather than being taped, it could be variable. Sometimes one of his guests, and the panelists he had to help question them, would take up the full hour, effortlessly. Sometimes, however, he'd get a kook who just didn't come off and Ed would have to wind up the interview and play music and chatter for the rest of the time.

Tonight, he had a satisfied belief he wasn't going to have to play music.

He said into the mike, after the routine of station identification and the naming of the program, "Folks, tonight we've got something different. Of course, every Friday night I try to bring you something, somebody, different. We've had everything from a man who talked to

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horses to a woman that flew. Now, of course, to some this might not seem very far out, but on *this* program things are special. Not only did our guest talk to horses like any jockey or cowboy might do, but he got replies since he was speaking horse language. And our woman who flew didn't bother to have an airplane around her. She flew all by her lonesome. Levitation, she called it."

From the side of his eyes, Ed Wonder could see that his guest of the evening, Ezekiel Joshua Tubber, wasn't taking this any too well. And his daughter, sitting next to him, was showing signs of acute apprehension.

Ed hurried on. "But tonight, folks, we've got somebody here who'll really set you back. A religious prophet, criss-cross my heart and point to heaven, who can cast hexes wholesale. And what's more, we're going to prove it. Because folks, we have here in the studio the man responsible for the Homespun Look, that supposed fad which has swept the globe in the past week. It's not a fad, folks, not a fad at all. It's a real, true hex which our guest of the evening, Ezekiel Joshua Tubber, has cast on all womankind. Also with us tonight is Nefertiti Tubber, daughter of our guest-in-chief; Helen Fontaine, well known Kingsburg socialite; and Buzz De Kemp, whose byline in the *Times-Tribune* you've all come to know. Mr. Kemp who simply doesn't believe in spells, folks, will help question evangelist Ezekiel Joshua Tubber.

"Now then, first of all, Mr. Tubber, with a name like yours I assume in your revival meetings you carry on a long tradition of a good Christian family."

The Lincolnesque face had been losing some of its gentle sadness as Ed progressed. Now Tubber said tightly, "Then you make an incorrect assumption, Edward. First, the meetings I have been addressing are not revivals. It is my teaching that Christianity, along with Judaism, Mohammadanism, and indeed all other present day organized religions, is a dead, profitless religion and I have no intention of reviving the corpse."

"Oh," Ed said blankly. "Ah, evidently I gained a wrong impression, folks. Then, just what were you, ah, preaching at your tent meetings over on Houston Street, Mr. Tubber?"

"A *new* religion, Edward. One fitted to our times." His voice had taken on inspiration.

Buzz De Kemp said wryly, "The human race needs another religion like it needs an extra collective aperature in the head. We've got so many religions now, we can't sort them out."

Tubber turned on him quickly. "To the contrary. But very little knowledge of religion shows that a major one has not come upon the scene for nearly fifteen hundred years. And what was that? Mohammedanism, a religion, like Judaism and Christianity, born in the desert to express the religious needs of semi-barbaric nomads. The great religions of the East, such as the Hindu and the Buddhist, are even older. I tell you, dear ones, that in their day per-

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haps these beliefs of our ancestors were positive in their effects. But the world has changed. Man has changed. There is need today for a new religion, one that fits our modern condition. One that will point out the way to a more full life, not simply parrot the words of men of past centuries who knew not the problems that would confront our generation. The proof that these hoary religions of the past are no longer valid is to be seen in the direction of our people. We play lip service to our churches, temples, synagogues and mosques, but the lives we lead are without ethic."

Buzz De Kemp said skeptically, "And you think it's up to you to start this new religion, eh?"

"An individual, dear one, does not start a religion. A religion swells up from the hearts of a people to fit a need. Had the Christ been born two thousand years earlier, there would have been none to listen to his words, his time was not yet. Were the Prophet Mohammed to be born today, rather than in the sixth Century, he would meet with closed ears rather than the open acceptance of his own times. It is simply that I have been one of the first to sense this need for a new creed. I have felt it and the duty is upon me to spread the word."

Ed Wonder wasn't feeling any too happy about this. Mulligan had warned him repeatedly that he was to stay away from politics and anyone who attacked accepted religion. Mulligan didn't want any subversives or atheists on WAN.

Ed said hurriedly, "Well, folks, this is all very interesting. Our guest of honor seems to think the world is due for a new religion. It reminds me of that chap we had on a few months ago who told us he had flown up to Jupiter and been given a New Bible which he was going to have published."

Tubber's face was growing dark again, and Nefertiti made ineffective motions to Ed Wonder which were obviously meant to turn off his present trend of chatter.

"But let's get back to this curse thing, sir. Now . . ."

Buzz De Kemp said, "Just a minute, Little Ed. This new religion. From what you've said, and from your lectures I've attended, I get the impression that there are socio-economic connotations to it. Now could you tell us, briefly, just what this new religion stands for?"

"Yes, of course." Tubber seemed slightly placated. "We seek the path to a better life. To Elysium, where a new society will replace that of today."

"Just a minute," De Kemp broke in. "You mean this new religion of yours plans on upsetting the present social order?"

"Exactly," Tubber said.

"Overthrowing the government?"

"Of course," Tubber said, as though nothing could be more obvious.

"You plan to establish some sort of communism . . . ?"

"Certainly not. The communists are not radical enough for me, dear one."

Ed Wonder closed his eyes in

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anguish. He could picture Fontaine, Mulligan and the whole Stephen Decatur Society, for that matter, all tuned in.

He said, hurriedly, "Now this curse thing."

"What curse thing?" Tubber said testily. It was obvious that the whole show was not going anyway similar to what he'd had in mind. "You keep talking about hexes and curses. Is this a serious program or not?"

Nefertiti put a hand on his arm and whispered, "Father . . . "

He shook off her gentle restraint and glared at Ed Wonder.

Buzz De Kemp was chuckling silently.

Ed looked at the would-be religious leader blankly. "The curse," he said. "The curse you put on Miss Fontaine here, and all womankind."

It was Tubber's turn to go blank. "Are you insane?" he demanded.

Ed Wonder put his hand over his eyes and leaned for a brief moment on the table.

Helen at long last said something. She leaned forward and said urgently, "Little Ed has asked me to publicly apologize to you and ask that the curse be lifted."

Ezekiel Joshua Tubber was beginning to swell. His gray streaked beard had a bristling quality.

"What curse?" he bellowed.

"Last Saturday," Helen said worriedly. "You were talking about the waste of national resources or something and that women changing styles all the time were helping to deplete our nation, however you put it. And I argued with you."

Nefertiti said placatingly, "Father forgets what he says when he speaks in wrath."

Ezekiel Joshua Tubber rumbled ominously, "I begin to suspect that thou hast brought me here to ridicule the Path to Elysium."

Ed Wonder could see his super-show melting away by the moment. "Now look here, Mr. Tubber . . . "

"I have told thee that I forbid being addressed as Mister. . . " The cult leader was beginning to breathe deeply, and for the second time Ed Wonder and Helen Fontaine witnessed his seeming growth in size.

"All right, all right," Ed said, peevish himself. "All I can say is you don't seem very grateful for this opportunity to reach all these good folks tuned in for a bit of entertainment."

"Entertainment!" Tubber thundered. "Yes, entertainment! Thou hast brought me before the snickering multitudes to be presented as a freak, as a crank. I knew not the nature of your show, Edward Wonder." He began coming to his feet.

Nefertiti moaned, "Oh, no," so softly that none heard.

Buzz De Kemp had brought a stogie from his coat pocket and placed it in his mouth. He was grinning around it happily. He said now, "Face facts, Zeke, old boy. The only chance you've got of spreading your word around is by the use of radio and TV. People just aren't interested in treking out to sit on wooden chairs in tents. They want their entertainment piped into their homes. And, believe me, if you want to put your story over, you're going to have

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to spice it up. Get a few jollies into it." He laughed.

To his horror, Ed Wonder could see, through the heavy glass of the studio wall, Jensen Fontaine, immediately followed by a blowing Matthew Mulligan, come storming in the direction of Jerry's control booth. Ed closed his eyes.

He opened them to find Ezekiel Joshua Tubber seemingly reared a full six and a half feet, one clinched fist on high.

"Radio!" he trumpeted *"Now verily do I curse radio, this invention of evil which in truth hast robbed our people of all individuality. Which hast verily made of them unthinking clods awaiting foolish entertainment."*

"Oh, brother," Buzz said happily.

". . . the power . . ." Nefertiti moaned.

Ezekiel Joshua Tubber spun on his heel and began storming out the studio door, Nefertiti scuddling after him.

Ed Wonder sank back into his chair with a groan. In the control room he could see Mulligan and Fontaine. The soundproofing prevented his hearing what were obvious shouts of command on the part of the red-faced tycoon. However, Jerry didn't seem overly concerned at their words. The radio engineer was scowling down at his controls, fiddling with dials and switches.

X

To rescue what could be rescued from the debacle, Ed Wonder said hurriedly into his mike, "Well, folks, I'm afraid things have come a cropper tonight. Of course, that can happen on the best of shows when everything's off the cuff and you're dealing with guests who are non-pros. So we'll have a bit of music now and possibly later I'll fill you in with a little background on what we *expected* to present to you tonight. Jerry, let the music go round!"

The red light flicked off indicating that Studio Three was no longer hot, and Mulligan's voice over the intercom from the control booth blatted, "Wonder! We'll see you in my office soonest!"

Ed Wonder closed his eyes in suffering.

He opened them wearily, warily. Ezekiel Joshua Tubber and his daughter Nefertiti were gone. Helen Fontaine and Buzz De Kemp alone still sat at the studio table. Buzz was chuckling inanely. He brought out a kitchen match and flicked it into flame with a thumb nail and lit the stogie he'd been chewing on.

"Now that's what I'd slug a show," he proclaimed. "If I could get programs with jollies like this, I might listen to radio."

Helen said, "I'm sorry, Little Ed. Oh, *Mother*, what a mess."

Ed looked at the engineer's control booth. Jensen Fontaine and Mulligan had already left it, evidently having adjourned to the latter's office to rig up a guillotine.

Ed went to the studio's soundproof door, opened it, crossed to the control booth door and went inside. Jerry was still fiddling with his controls, scowling.

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Ed said, "What's the matter here?"

Jerry looked up at him, taking his pipe from his mouth the better to talk. "We're getting a 1/8th second echo that's just as strong as the original."

"What's that?"

Jerry told him, adding, "And if you want to get driven nuts rapidly, try listening to something with a 1/2 to 1/10 second echo." He put his pipe back in his mouth and went back to his fiddling. "I'll clear it up in a minute."

"Like the devil . . . " Ed muttered. He turned and left the booth. Helen and Buzz were just leaving Studio Three.

Helen said, "We're going to see Daddy with you. It wasn't your fault."

Buzz said around his stogie, "Maybe the paper needs a radio-TV editor and you can get a job with us."

Ed glared at him. "This is a great time to make with funnies, you sloppy bum. The whole thing was your idea."

Buzz chuckled. "Sorry. I didn't know the old boy was *that* cracked. Did you dig that expression when he was laying his hex on radio? Wow, what a story it'd be if it really worked. If he could lay a hex on radio. What a story."

Ed started down the hall. He growled, "Then you'd better start writing it."

They entered the general office, Helen and Buzz bringing up the rear. Buzz said in puzzlement, "What'da mean, chum?"

Ed stopped briefly at Dolly's desk. Dolly was frantically answering calls.

"Yes, yes we know. Reception is scrambled. The engineers are working on it. It will be all right very shortly. Thank you for calling." And then, all over again. "Yes . . . yes, we know the program isn't coming over. The engineers . . . "

Ed, Helen and Buzz continued on, the newspaperman staring back over his shoulder at the office girl. He said to Ed Wonder, "What's going on?"

"The hex is going on," Ed said. He held the door open for Helen and they entered Mulligan's office.

Jensen Fontaine stood in the center of the room, evidently counting down before blast-off. When Ed entered he roared, "Wonder, you're fired!"

"I know, I know," Ed told him. He walked over to the built-in TV screen that occupied a sizeable portion of one wall and flicked it on. Fontaine, Mulligan and Helen, and Buzz for that matter, were staring at him. It wasn't the reaction any of them, knowing Ed Wonder, had expected.

He waited for the screen to clear. It never quite did. Finally he turned the set off again. He said absently, "TV is a form of radio, too. I wonder if even radar is affected."

He turned back to Jensen Fontaine and Mulligan.

Fontaine evidently assumed that the other hadn't understood him. He bellowed again, "Giving that atheistic subversive the opportunity to speak his piece on my radio station, you ass! I tell you, Wonder, you're fired!"

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"I know it," Ed grunted. "So is everybody else on radio and TV. Goodnight, everybody."

Ed Wonder was awakened by the alarm's voice saying, "You are wanted on the phone."

He grumbled himself awake. He'd been dreaming of Ezekiel Joshua Tubber who was about to lay a curse on eating food. Ed Wonder and Nefertiti, who for some unknown reason had been attired in a bikini, had been frantically trying to dissuade the old man. Ed scratched his wisp of a moustache.

His elaborate TV - stereo - radio - phono - tape - record - alarm said again, "You are wanted on the telephone," more loudly this time.

He yawned. "Oh, yeah," and switched it on.

Mulligan's voice blatted, "Little Ed! Where've you been?"

He yawned again. "I haven't been anywhere. Remember? I'm fired."

"Well, now look, maybe we can do something about that. See here, Little Ed . . ."

Even as the other was talking, Ed Wonder switched on the TV screen. He winced when it lit up. He turned to another channel, and then another. The 1/8th second echo was still plaguing the radio waves. He killed it.

Mulligan was saying, "Mr. Fontaine was possibly a little hasty."

"Oh, I wouldn't say that," Ed told him.

"Well, at any rate, it looks like he's been talking to his daughter and Miss Fontaine seems to have taken your part. They want to see you over at their place. See here, you know what's been going on?"

"Yes," Ed said.

Mulligan ignored him. "It's sun spots, or something. There's not a station on the air that's giving any sort of reception at all."

"Yeah," Ed said. It occurred to him that neither Mulligan nor Fontaine had heard Tubber making with his curse. They'd been too busy yelling at Jerry in the control room to switch off the program.

"Well, look, Little Ed. Are you going over to see Mr. Fontaine?"

"No," Ed said. He switched off the phone, then stared down at it. He realized that he had performed a long-time ambition that he hadn't realized he'd had. He'd hung up on Fatso.

He grunted. What neither Mulligan or Fontaine realized was that there was no point in worrying about regaining his job — not so long as there was no TV or radio.

When he'd finished shaving, showering and dressing, he decided that breakfast in his own auto-kitchen didn't appeal to him and that he'd go down to the corner drug store and dial himself some sausage and egg. He had some thinking to do, but he was in no hurry to start. He gave a last look at himself in the bathroom mirror. Thirty-three years. Ten years spent trying to break into the thinning ranks of show business. Nearly five working himself patiently up in TV and radio. Now at thirty-three, jobless. Oh, great. But somehow he didn't feel as badly as he thought he ought to be feeling.

He turned to go and then looked

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back again and eyed his tiny moustache. A little wisp of moustache was to be seen on the faces of practically every aggressive young executive in the thirty to forty year age bracket. It was currently the thing.

Ed Wonder took up his jar of *NoShav* and rubbed a smear of it across the sprig of hair. He took up a towel, and wiped the hair away. He looked back into the mirror and nodded satisfaction.

There was quite a crowd in the drug store, but Ed Wonder managed to find a seat at the fountain. Most of them were gathered around the magazine rack.

He knew the manager of the place and saw him standing nearby. "What's going on?" Ed said.

The other said, "Never had such a turnover of comic books since I've been in the business. Practically sold out already, and it's not even noon. Having more rushed in."

"Comic books?"

"Uh-huh. Something's wrong with TV and even radio. One of the papers says it's Soviet Complex sabotage. Some kind of scientific thing they got over in Siberia. Anyway, until they get it fixed nobody can watch TV. It'll probably drive my wife and kids kooky, but while it still lasts I'm sure selling comic books."

Ed said emptily, "They're not going to get fixed. It's going to stay this way."

The manager looked at him. "Don't be a twitch, Little Ed. You got to have TV."

Ed didn't want to argue. He gave one more look at the empty-faced adults packed around the comic book stands, then turned and dialed his meal and coffee. He kept his mind as clear as he could of the subject that was wriggling to get through. When he started thinking about it, he was afraid it was going to hurt.

However, when he had finished, he went back to the garages beneath his apartment building and got the Volkshover. He was probably looking for trouble, sheer trouble. But he drove over to Houston Street and the lot where Tubber and his daughter had had their tents pitched. The girl had said that the old man didn't remember what he said in wrath, and evidently it was when he was in wrath that his curses came off. The thing to do was to deal with him in such manner as not to let him get stirred up. Maybe there was some way to reverse this whole thing. If he could pull it off, then would be the time to see about getting his job back.

The lot where the tents had been was empty.

Ed looked at it blankly. He might have remembered. They had been packing up to leave when he and Buzzo had braced Tubber about appearing on the program.

He thought about it for a minute. Finally he brought the Volkshover back into the air and headed for the *Times-Tribune* building. It was a bit past noon, but Buzzo's hours were on the erratic side to say the least. There was as much chance to find him in during the lunch hour as ever.

There seemed to be an unusual

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number of persons in the streets. Most of them aimlessly milling around. And there were long lines before the movie theaters. At this point, Ed didn't connect it.

By luck, Buzz De Kemp was at his desk in the city room. He looked up at Ed's approach. Ed found a chair, reversed it, so that the back pressed against his jacket front when he straddled it. They looked at each other.

Ed said finally, "Did you run the story?"

Buzz shrugged and fished a stogie from a box out of a desk drawer. "I wrote it up. It's on the eighth page of the morning edition. Somebody on rewrite thought it'd make a cute little gag piece so he did a revision." His voice turned wry. "Improved it considerably. More jollies."

"So nobody believed you, eh?"

"Of course not. I gave up. Look at it the city editor's way. Would *you* believe it? He sent me home to dealcoholize."

"No," Ed said. "No, I wouldn't believe it."

They looked at each other for a time again

Finally Ed cleared his throat and said, "I was just over at the lot where Tubber was holding his talks."

"And . . . ?"

"He's gone. No signs of them left. I thought I might talk it over with him and his daughter. She seems to be lucid enough."

Buzz thought about that. "Let's go into the morgue," he said finally, getting to his feet.

Ed Wonder followed him from the city room, down a corridor into another room presided over by an ancient who was unhurriedly clipping what was evidently a pile of yesterday's edition of the *Times-Tribune* with an enormous pair of shears. He grunted something at Buzz who grunted something in return and hence they ignored each other.

Buzz De Kemp muttered, "Tubber," and drew forth a deep file of folders. He fingered through them. "Tubber, Tubber, Ezekiel Joshua. Here it is."

He brought forth a manila folder and led the way to a heavy table, sat down and opened it. There were three very short clippings, their dates penciled in on the top of each. Buzz scanned them quickly, handed each in turn to Ed Wonder.

He leaned back in his chair and shook his head. "Simple announcements of his meetings, extending back over several years. The location of his tent, what time the sermon begins. The title of his first sermon, *Is the Nation Producing Itself Poor?* No information on where he came from or where he might be going."

Ed Wonder said gloomily, "Jensen Fontaine thinks Tubber is a pseudonym."

Buzz shook his head. "Not a name like that. Nobody but fond parents from the Bible belt would ever hang a moniker like that on a kid. Nobody'd do it to himself."

"He said he wasn't a Christian."

"Maybe not, but his folks were. Probably evangelists. When he gets all wrathed up, he inadvertently starts talking like a Holy Roller, or

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whatever. He must've picked that up as a kid. Listen, Little Ed, how badly do you want to find him, and why? What happened to your moustache?"

Ed scratched where his tufts of moustache had been that morning. He muttered in self-deprecation, "Maybe now that I'm no longer a bright young career man, it's not as important to look like one."

Buzz De Kemp cocked his head at him and lit the stogie he'd been only fiddling with, thus far. "That doesn't sound like Little Ed Wonder," he said.

"What does *Little* Ed Wonder sound like?" Ed said, snap there.

Buzz grinned at him. "Usually like a heel on the make."

"I don't see how you manage to put up with me," Ed snarled.

"I've wondered myself," Buzz grinned. "Maybe it's because I'm used to you. Ever notice how you put up with people you're used to. For some reason, you hate to give up anybody you've really got to know."

"So by the time you got to really know what a heel I was you were used to me and couldn't bear to avoid me, eh,"

"Something like that. Tone down. Look, how bad do you want to locate old man Tubber?"

Ed never had been able to get really sore at Buzz De Kemp's gibes. But even if he had, he wouldn't have felt like it now. "I don't know," he grumbled. "I'm probably stupid. If he laid eyes on me, he'd probably lay down a hex that'd last like hemophilia. But I've been in on this since the beginning, it's too late to try to duck out now."

Buzz De Kemp eyed him. "What's in it for you?" He blew smoke around the stogie without removing it from his mouth. "Beyond the death wish, I mean."

"Oh, great. Funnies I get," Ed muttered. "Nothing's in it for me. What in the devil *could* there be in it?"

The newspaperman shook his head. "Sure doesn't sound like Little Ed Wonder. Okay, so fine. I'll get on it. Maybe there'll be a birth record of the old boy, giving some idea of where they live. Maybe AP-Reuters will have something on him. Get out of here and check back with me later. I feel something like you do. In it from the beginning."

XI

Ed Wonder went down to the corner auto-bar with the idea of dialing himself a stiff one. His mind on Tubber and hexes, he wasn't aware of the crowd until he was within a hundred feet of the bar's entrance. His first impression was that there had been an accident, or, more likely still, in view of the magnitude of the mob, some act of violence. A shooting, or something.

It wasn't that.

There was a policeman outside, lining up the crowd into a manageable queue. Inside, a juke-box was at full blast.

"All right, everybody, all right. Stay in line," the cop was singing out, and over and over again.

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Little Ed said, "What's happened, officer?"

The cop said, busily, "Get in line, buddy, get in line if you want a drink. Everybody's gotta get in line."

"Get in line for *what*?" Ed stared.

"A drink, a drink. You're allowed in for two drinks, or for half an hour, whatever comes off first. So get in line."

"What the devil," Ed blurted. "I don't need a drink that bad."

Somebody in the line took umbrage at that. "Oh, yeah," he said savagely. "What'da gonna do, walk up and down the streets all day? The damn TV's been on the blink since . . ."

Somebody else chimed in their disgust, and before he could get his complaint across, a heavier voice had drowned him out.

Ed went off, flabbergasted. It had only happened the night before. Less than twenty-four hours.

As he walked back to where he had parked the Volkshover, he noticed that it wasn't only the autobars. Restaurants, ice cream parlors, drug stores, were all packed and over-packed, and usually with lines out in front. All that had juke-boxes had them tuned high. Proprietors were doing a landoffice business, but Ed wondered where the money was coming from. Even under the welfare state, the average person didn't have the wherewithal continually to patronize restaurants and bars.

He got into his hovercar and considered it for awhile. Finally he brought the vehicle to life and headed for a destination. He had the address firmly enough in mind, but had never been there. The house located, he stood before the identity screen and fanned the alert.

A voice said, "Little Ed! Come on in. I'll be right up."

Ed opened the door, stepped in and navigated a few yards down an entry way to what was obviously a living-room cum library. He was astonished by the layout. The room could have been a movie set depicting a home of yesteryear. There were some prints that Ed vaguely recognize from way back, but they certainly had no faintest resemblance to the current Surrealistic-Revival School that was currently in. You'd think that the owner had hung the things for . . . well, possibly because he *liked* them. You could get a reputation as a twitch awfully quick doing that sort of thing. And the chairs, tables, furniture. Right from an antique shop, several decades out of style.

A voice said, "Hi, friend. Come to see about Manny Levy for that swami show?"

Ed Wonder looked at his host, bringing his mind from his surprise at the bizarre room the other affected. "Swami?" he said.

"The fire walker. You called a couple of days ago about a fire walker. What's the matter with you, Little Ed? Remember me . . . Jim Westbrook? Sometimes panelist on the Far Out Hour, at a going rate of fifty dollars per appearance, cash in advance."

Ed Wonder shook his head. "Listen," he said. "Where've you been the last twenty-four hours?"

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"Right here." Westbrook said.

"In this house?"

"Of course. I've been doing some concentrated work."

"Haven't you turned your TV set on?"

"I haven't got a TV set."

Ed Wonder stared at him as though the off-beat engineer had gone mad. "You haven't got a TV set? Everybody's got a TV set. How do you tune in on . . ."

Jim Westbrook said patiently, "I suppose if something came up I wanted to follow, I could wander over to some neighbor's or friend's. But, off hand, I can't think of any such programs coming up for the past several years."

Ed Wonder closed his eyes in pain. He opened them and said, "I don't have time to go into it now, but, well, what do you do with your free time, listen to radio, go to the movies?"

"I don't have any free time," the other told him reasonably. "I get my rhabdomancy jobs once or twice a week. Then down in the cellar I've got my darkroom, electronics shop, woodworking shop, and I'm working up a small machine-shop operation. Besides . . ."

"All right," Ed said. "That's enough. Already you sound like triplets."

"Sit down and have a drink," Jim said easily.

Ed looked around the room. "Where's your auto-bar?" He grimaced before sinking into one of the prehistoric-looking overstuffed chairs. Surprisingly, it was comfortable, no matter how kooky so far as style was concerned. It must have gone back to at least the 1950's.

"Can't stand the things," Westbrook told him. "A well-mixed drink is a work of art, not a formula."

Ed refused to consider that heresy. In spite of his liking of Dave Zeiss's bar, he had always thought of Dave's as an affectation, a bit to be ashamed of. But in one's own home, with auto-bars readily available. Who would ever . . .

He shook his head to clear it of that non-essential problem, and said, "The devil with the drink. Listen, Jim, the swami who walks on coals is out—at least temporarily. You'll find out why, later. Just now, I don't have time to go into the detail I suspect you'd demand. What I came over to ask you is this. Are miracles possible?"

Jim Westbrook dropped into the chair opposite his guest, his face alert. "What kind of miracles?"

"Something affecting, well, everybody. Say, a universal curse."

The engineer pursed his lips. "You know, one of the difficulties with these subjects is our terminology. Use a term such as miracle, or curse, or magic, and intellectual hackles immediately go up, as conditioned. But without getting into semantics, to answer your question, yes. There would seem to have been miracles, and, if so, there probably still are, or at least could be."

Ed held up a hand. "Now, wait a minute. Name just one."

"You can have a dozen if you want. Moses parting the water. Jesus feeding the multitudes with a

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few fish and seven loaves of bread."

Ed said, in disappointment, "It's debated whether or not either of them ever lived."

Jim Westbrook shrugged. "The Moslems are just as convinced that Mohammed performed various miracles, and nobody would deny his historicity. Or take St. Teresa of Avila. She could evidently levitate. I suppose that would come under the head of miracle, or magic, to most of her contemporaries and most of ours. I just object to the terms. I think that levitation is a, well, normal attribute of some persons. The fact that it is poorly understood doesn't make it a miracle when someone such as, say, Saint Dunstan, the Archbishop of Canterbury, performs the act. Or, off hand, among others I can think of who could levitate were Saints Philip Benitas, Bernard Ptolomei, Dominic, Francis Xavier and Albert of Sicily. Then there was Savonarola, who was seen floating a couple of feet or so off his dungeon cell floor just before they burned him to death."

"All of them religious fanatics," Ed complained. "I don't trust their witnesses. A fanatic religious crank can see anything when he's keyed up. I'm an old hand, what with my program."

His host twisted his mouth. "Well, then there was D. D. Home. His witnesses were far from religious cranks when they saw him float out of a window and then return through another one, ten stories off the ground. And Mrs. Guppy and the Reverend Stainton Moses, all fairly recent and all well checked upon by figures of prominence in the scientific world."

Ed Wonder was unhappy. He rubbed the end of his nose with his left forefinger. He felt an urge to scratch his now non-existent moustache.

Jim Westbrook looked at him, eyebrows slightly raised, waiting for the next.

Just to say something, Ed made a sweeping gesture to encompass the room. "What're you trying to put over with this kooky room, Jim?" When the engineer didn't seem to get the question, he added, "All this out-of-date furniture, no auto-bar no TV, primitive art, if you can call it art, on the walls."

Jim Westbrook said wryly, "Velazquez and Murillo weren't exactly Cro-Magnon cavewall painters, Little Ed."

"Yeah, but what do your friends think about all this twitchy layout?"

Westbrook considered him, his mouth twisted slightly in sour humor. "I don't have a great many friends, real friends, these days, Little Ed. Those I do have, usually agree with me. They think this room is comfortable, which is the basic thing, and utilitarian, which is next. Beyond that . . ." he laughed, ". . . at least some of them prefer Velazquez to the Surrealistic-Revival agonies of Jackson Salvadore."

It came to Ed in a quick surprise that the heavy-set, alert engineer across from him didn't particularly like Ed Wonder. It came as a surprise, because Ed had known the

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other for some years and had always got along with him. He'd had him on the Far Out Hour several times, since the man had a bent for off-beat subjects and seemed to be an authority on everything from para-psychology to space travel. Above all, he had a mischievous love of baiting scientific conventional wisdom and was a veritable Charles Fort in finding material with which to butcher the Sacred Cow.

He had always thought of Jim Westbrook as a friend, and only now did he know the other didn't reciprocate. Before thought, he blurted, "Jim, why do you dislike me?"

The other's eyebrows went up again and he held his silence for a long moment. Finally he said slowly, "It's not the sort of question people usually ask, Little Ed. When they do, they seldom really want it answered."

"No. Tell me." Those words came out too, without volition.

Jim Westbrook leaned back in his chair. "All right, friend. The fact is I don't dislike you. I'm neutral. You know what? You're a stereotype, like practically everybody else. We're becoming a nation of stereotypes. Everybody is a stereotype. Why in the world should all girls want to look like the current sex-symbol, Brigitte Loren? But they do. The short and the fat and the tall. And all ambitious young businessmen want to look exactly the same, in their Brooks Brothers suits. They're scared to death not to look exactly the same. They want to conform to the point where conformity becomes ludicrous. What in the hell has happened to our civilization? Remember when we had the term individuality? Rugged individualism? Now we're frightened not to look exactly like the man next door looks, not to live in the identically same sort of house, drive the same kind of car."

"So you think I'm just one more stereotype."

"Yes."

He had asked for it, but as the burly engineer had gone on, Ed Wonder had felt himself coming to a slow boil. Now he bit out, "But you're not, of course."

Jim Westbrook had to chuckle wryly. "I'm afraid calling a man a stereotype is something like telling him he has no sense of humor, that he isn't a good driver, or that he's a poor lover."

Ed snapped, "Not to resort to an old wheeze, but if you're so smart, why aren't you rich?"

The other cut off his amusement and there seemed an air almost of compassion in what he said. "I am rich. About as rich as a person can get, because I'm doing what I want to do and have achieved or am achieving the things I find desirable. Or did you mean money? If you meant money, I have all I need. Probably if I devoted more time, especially if I devoted all of my time, to getting more, I could. But I haven't enough time as it is to do all the things I want to do, so wouldn't it be rather silly for me to spend any more time than I have to chasing money?"

"I've heard that bit before," Ed

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said. "But I've always noticed that those who have it on the ball, who are really smart, get up there on top."

Jim Westbrook said gently, "I'm not disagreeing, friend, but it might be a question of what you consider the top. A chap named Lyle Spencer, who was president of the Science Research Associates at the time, did some research on intelligence quotients. He found that engineers and scientists of top ranking average about 135 in I.Q. Top business executives went to about 120. Spencer pointed out that most presidents of corporations weren't as smart as their employees in their research departments. In fact, on averages they ranked under such mundane occupations as pharmacists, teachers, medical students, general bookkeepers, mechanical engineers and accountants. So evidently intelligence isn't the prime ingredient in getting to the top, as you call it."

Ed sneered, "Oh, great. So if somebody came along and offered you a half million, you'd say, 'No thanks, I'm too smart. I'd rather be happy, playing with my darkroom and electronics shop, down in the basement.'"

The other laughed. "I didn't say I'd refuse more money if it came along, Little Ed. I realize the advantages of having money. It's just that I'm not going to spend the balance of my life pursuing the stuff at the price of giving up what I really value." He came to his feet. "We don't seem to be hitting it off any too well today, friend. What do you say we postpone matters until another time?"

It wasn't too crude a brush-off, but brush-off it was. Disgusted more with himself, than the other, Ed stood and started for the door. Jim Westbrook followed him. Evidently, the engineer hadn't been in the slightest discomfited by the radioman's words.

At the door, Ed turned and said, "Get a newspaper, or walk on over and talk to your nearest neighbors that have a TV set or radio. Maybe I'll get in touch with you again later."

"All right," Westbrook said.

XII

The bars had been packed the night before, and the time you were allowed to remain, rationed. Ed Wonder had given up his hopes of sitting in one long enough to get an edge on, and the taste of what Jim Westbrook had said to him out of his mouth. It hadn't tasted so good.

Not only had the bars been packed but the streets as well. In all his memory, Ed Wonder couldn't remember ever having seen the streets so thronged with pedestrians. They didn't seem in particular to have any place to go. Just strolling up and down, aimlessly. The lines before the movie houses were so long as to be meaningless. Those toward the end couldn't possibly have got inside until the following day.

Ed had gone back to his own apartment and dialed his auto-bar

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for a long drink. He sank into his reading chair, glass in hand and grunted his contempt of the over-stuffed antiques in Jim Westbrook's establishment. Comfortable? Sure, but how kooky could you get?

Stereotype was he! The gall of the guy. Ed Wonder had worked his way up the hard way. He had accomplished practically straight "C's" in high school, even a few "B's" in such subjects as dramatics and gym. Sufficient grades to get him easily into college. It had been a rough row to hoe. The government subsidies had hardly covered his expenses. He'd had to drive a used car, eat at the university cafeteria, keep the same clothes until they all but showed signs of wear. Yes, Ed Wonder had got his education the hard way. Four years of such tough subjects as Dramatics, Debating, The Dance, Sex Techniques, and Togetherness.

And then the long years, fighting his way up. Not for Edward Wonder to go immediately from school onto the unemployment benefits. No, sir. He took temporary compensation while actually looking for employment. For ten years he had been on list at the theatres, the studios, the stations, trying to find parts. Of course, temporary compensation paid off better than straight unemployment insurance. It meant that you were actually trying to find a job, which was enough to show, right there, that Ed Wonder was no stereotype. The very fact that he bothered to look branded him a kook in some eyes.

And then finally the switch over to radio and TV. He'd finally, through luck, a minimum of bribery, and the romancing of the fat wife of a studio executive, made his entry into the show business of the air.

Stereotype, eh? Then how had he finally got to the point of having his own program, the Far Out Hour?

He got up and dialed another drink. A double this time.

He'd show them who was a stereotype.

He finished the drink in several quick gulps.

Stereotype!

He'd shaved off his moustache, hadn't he?

In the morning, Ed Wonder went on back to his auto-kitchen and dialed breakfast. He should have been feeling off from the drinks of the night before, but he wasn't. He didn't know why he wasn't but there you were. The fact of the matter was, he felt all set to go. Somewhere. He didn't know where.

After he'd finished eating he threw the dishes into the disposal chute and went back into the living room. He dialed the Unemployment Bureau, listing himself as temporarily unemployed, listed himself as available for work as a program director for TV or radio, applied for temporary compensation to be deposited directly to his account.

Then he dialed the Universal Credit Administration and applied for a moritorium on all installment payments. Even as he did so, Ed

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Wonder reflected that whatever egg-head economist had dreamed up the idea of moritorium had plugged one of the biggest potential holes in the workings of the affluent society. As never-never buying had pyramided, the powers that were had suffered increasingly sleepless nights over the possible consequences of even a fairly mild recession. Had foreclosures ever begun on a grand scale, the whole thing would have avalanched, and as used products flooded the markets, factories would have closed down all over the place, aggravating the recession still more. Yes, whoever had dreamed up credit moritorium had avoided that pitfall of classical capitalism. Of course, so long as you were on moritorium, you couldn't run up any fresh installment credit, but you can't have everything, even under the Welfare State.

Business finished with, he leaned back and considered matters. He was out of work. If the automated machinery of the welfare state's employment bureau found a potential position for him, he would be notified. Meanwhile, there was nothing to do. No point in going about haunting studios, or stations. They'd think he was a twitch if he went traipsing around on his own.

Well, you had to kill time someway. He reached out and flicked on the TV screen.

For the moment he had forgotten. The screen was a horror of the abstract. He hurriedly cut it off again. Evidently, the stations were getting through.

Just for the exercise, he went on down to the corner drug store to pick up a paper. They were all gone. Happily the manager had a copy of his own in a back room and let Ed take it.

There were still crowds around the magazine and paperback stands.

Ed said to the other, "Business in comic books still good eh?"

"Oh no," the manager shook his head beaming. "We're fresh out of comic books already. There's no more in town. The agents say the presses are turning night and day putting out extra editions but for the time we're out. Now they're buying paperbacks and magazines. Even all the more popular magazines are gone. *Roguette, Playguy, Too-True* and *Nake* I got premium prices for. And there's not a detective paperback left, either, and no westerns."

The smile left his face. "Good business, this emergency, but it sure is hell to go home to the Missus at night. We got nothing to do but yell at each other, and the kids go batty with nothing to watch."

Ed Wonder took the paper back to his apartment before opening it.

The newspapers were evidently staging a comeback, and enjoying every minute of it. With TV and radio news off the airwaves, it was back to newspapers again.

The heads went:

TV and Radio Scramble Worldwide

President to Hold Special Press Conference

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Mayor Smythe to ration Movie and Sports Tickets
Bored Mother Kills Brood and Commits Suicide
Soviet Complex Hints West Deliberately Sabotaging TV

He began to read the details and was interrupted almost immediately by the phone.

Buzz De Kemp's face, stogie a-smoke, filled the screen. "Hi, Little Ed. The great mystery has been solved."

For a moment Ed Wonder thought he meant . . . but no. He said, "What mystery?"

"Where Zeke and Nefertiti disappeared to."

"Oh," Ed leaned forward.

Buzz drew it out. "I really gave it the works. Everything but the F.B.I. I checked . . ."

"All right, all right," Ed snapped. "Let's have it."

"They moved up the river to the next town, Saugerties, and set up their tent again. Old Zeke is continuing his lecture tour."

Ed closed his eyes wearily. He'd had a mental picture of Ezekiel Joshua Tubber escaping by stowing away on a ship to Brazil, or possibly fleeing to the Soviet Complex Embassy and requesting political refuge, or possibly going to earth somewhere and hiding out.

Instead the off-beat evangelist was a few miles up the river, continuing as though nothing had happened.

Ed Wonder said, "Well, great. I'll pick you up."

"Hold on, chum," the reporter took the stogie from his mouth to use as a pointer. "Maybe that old coot might be a little sore at you, but he's really down on me. I was the one that sounded off and laughed at him. It was mostly me, on the program, who got him speaking in wrath, or however his daughter puts it. I think it might be better if just you show your cheerful face, at first."

"Oh great. We'll use me for baiting the tiger, eh?"

"It was your idea to find him again. You said you were in it from the beginning. Brave man. Stout fella."

Ed growled, "You mentioned you were in it from the beginning too."

"I was, and I'm going to keep in it, but from a distance, chum, from a distance. No look, I haven't even dared bring this up with Old Ulcers, the city ed, but you get the story on this exclusive for me and the *Times-Tribune* and we'll find some way of showing our appreciation. This is a story, Little Ed. The story of the century."

It only came home to Ed Wonder at that moment what a really big story it was. His mind flicked over into first. He could sell it to *Look at Life*, the picture magazine. He could sell it to . . .

His mind shifted back into low. No he couldn't. If Buzzo couldn't even approach his city editor in a one horse town like Kingsburg, who was going to listen to Ed Wonder in Ultra-New York?

He suspected that of all those involved, the only ones who really

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knew that the Homespun Look and the disruption of both TV and radio were the results of curses by Tubber, were himself, Buzz and Helen. Except, of course, for Tubber himself, Nefertiti and some of the followers of the word, or whatever they called themselves.

Buzz said impatiently, "Well?"

Where he got the courage, Ed didn't know, but he said, "Okay. I'll go on up to Saugerties for whatever it's worth. I'll keep you posted. Remember, if this pays off, I'm in on the loot."

The reporter rolled his eyes upward as though making solemn promise. "De Kemp always keeps Faith," he intoned.

"Yeah, sure," Ed growled, reaching his hand out to switch off the phone.

"Faith Schultz, that is. My kept woman. Her father owns the corner butcher shop."

"Funnies, I get, just before going to my doom," Ed said, killing the connection.

He took the elevator down to the cellar garage and got the Volkshover, keyed it to lift, lifted it half a foot from the floor, drifted up the ramp to the street, and headed north. The streets were more crowded than ever. He had never realized just how many persons lived in this city. In the far past, he supposed, the majority had spent the day hours working, the evening watching TV, listening to the radio, or taking in a movie. Of recent years, as the number of jobs decreased, until finally the unemployment rolls included a far greater number of citizens than did employment lists, the average citizen led a more sedentary existence. He had seen somewhere estimates that Mr. Average Man spent eight hours a day being entertained by mass media.

Well, a wheel had come off now.

He headed north at an altitude of about ten feet and noticed that traffic was heavier than was to be expected at this time of day. It didn't take long to figure out why. City dwellers on their way to the nearest water for a swim, or to the nearest woods for a picnic. Largely, their faces didn't indicate that they were expecting any great treat. Probably because their portables weren't working.

It came to Ed Wonder that such entertainment of yesteryear as swimming and picnicking had fallen off since he'd been a kid. In his day, youngsters still got a kick out of self entertainment, swimming, baseball, fishing, hiking, camping. Now such exercise had a tendency to be avoided because it interfered with listening in on this favorite program or that. Go out on a camping trip and you might miss *Robert Hope the Third's Hour*, or *I'm Squirrel For Mary*, not to speak of *The Sadistic Tale*. Of course, you could always take a portable along, but then you spent your time sitting around a campfire watching the shows, instead of in the comfort of your own home, where the mosquitos were apt to be the less.

Fishing. He remembered going fishing with his father as a kid. And by himself, for that matter. He

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might wind up with nothing at all, or maybe a meager string of sunfish, but he'd thought it fun. Today, a kid got more of a boot out of watching somebody in the Gulf Stream or off the coast of Peru catching a half ton Marlin, or spearing a Giant Ray skin diving off the Great Barrier reef of Australia. The vicarious thrill of playing a ten foot man-eating shark was evidently considerably more than tediously waiting for a four inch sunfish to take your worm.

Saugerties was one of those never-change New England type towns. Largely wooden houses. One story, two story, seldom more than three, even downtown. The type of overgrown village that made you wonder how it existed, its raison d'etre, why its population didn't emigrate to more lively climes.

Ed Wonder let his little hovercar drift to a halt before the Thornton Memorial Theatre, which, like the movie houses of his own town, had a long line before it. Near the curb stood three or four disgruntled citizens who had obviously decided that the line was so long it was hopeless to expect to gain entry.

Ed called, "Hey, Buddy, could you tell me where, ah, the Reverend Tubber has his tent set up?"

"Never heard of him," Buddy said.

"How about you, Mac?" Ed said.

Mac screwed up his face. "You know, I did see something in the paper about some revival tent meeting or something. Hey, you know what? That's something we could do. We could take in this here revival."

"Geez," Buddy said, as though in hope. "You know what? I think I'll go on home and round up the old lady and the kids and get over there before all the seats is taken."

Ed said patiently, "Could you tell me where they're set up?"

"Yeah, yeah," Mac said, evidently caught up with Buddy's idea, and ready to take off himself. "Down there about three blocks, then turn right and keep going until you wind up at the park. You can't miss it." He said that final ritual over his shoulder as he hurried off.

XIII

Ed drove three down and then to the left and eventually came to the park. Buddy and Mac were going to be disappointed. There was already a long line standing before the Tubber tent. It was still early afternoon, but the line was there.

"Standing room only," Ed muttered, hitting the drop lever. He wondered if Tubber was having a matinee. He parked and strode over to the entrance.

"Get in line, Jack. Take your turn," somebody growled at him. Faces took him in antagonistically.

Ed said, hurriedly, "I'm not here to listen to the, ah, sermon. I . . ."

"Sure, sure, we know, sharpy. Just get in line, is all. I been standing here two hours. You try to sneak ahead of me and you get a bust in the puss understand?"

Ed felt his usual stomach tightening at the threat of physical violence and took a double step backward. He looked in disconcertion at the three

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or four of the Tubber followers who were doing their harried best to keep order.

"The Speaker of the Word will be heard by all," one was saying, over and over again. "He is shortening his talks to half an hour so that everyone may have a chance to listen, in relays. Please be patient. The Speaker of the Word will be heard by all."

One of those in line grumbled, "Half an hour. You mean I been standing here all this time just for half an hour's show?"

Ed Wonder said, "It's not exactly a show, pal." He walked away from the line. Trying to get in the front entrance would have taken hours. Besides, it was no manner in which to consult Tubber. He was going to have to confront the prophet, if that was what you'd call him, face to face. He was liking the prospect less by the minute.

He walked around to the rear of the large tent and found that, as before, there was a smaller tent pitched behind it. Ed Wonder hesitated. He drifted around behind the canvas habitation. There was an old-fashioned farm wagon there and a horse quietly grazing.

He took a breath consciously, and returned to the entrance. How do you knock on the door of a tent?

He cleared his throat and called out, "Anybody home?"

He could hear a stirring inside and then the flap separated and Nefertiti Tubber was there.

She looked at him and flushed. "Good afternoon, dear one," she said. Then, in a gush, "Oh, Ed, I'm so sorry about the other night. I . . . I should have known better than to let father . . . ."

"Sorry," he said bitterly. "So's the whole world. Listen, do you know what's happened?"

She nodded dumbly.

"I'll tell you what's happened," he began.

She looked quickly around them, then held back the tent flap. "Please come in, Ed."

He followed her. The tent was surprisingly large and laid out comfortably into three rooms, two of which had flapped entries of their own. The equivalent of bedrooms, Ed decided. The larger space was a combination kitchen, living and dining room, and even went to the extent of a rug being on the ground. A rag rug, homemade, of the type that Ed Wonder hadn't seen since early childhood.

There were folding chairs about the table and Nefertiti hesitantly gestured to one of them. Ed sat down and looked at her. The fact that Ezekiel Joshua Tubber himself wasn't present gave him courage.

He said accusingly, "Every TV and radio station in the world is on the blink."

She nodded. "I just found out an hour or so ago. I went into town for some supplies from a follower of the path who resides not in Elysium."

Ed let that part of her statement that sounded like straight kookery go by and stuck to the first sentence. "Did you see all those people in the streets?"

She nodded dumbly.

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"How long has this been going on?"

She knew what he meant all right, all right.

"You mean . . . the power? The power to breath the word?"

Ed Wonder closed his eyes in weary pain. "Let's drop the twitchy language for the moment. What is it your father *does?*"

She looked at him as though nothing could be more obvious. "He exercises the power and utters the words. But usually, of course, only when he is in wrath. You and your friend, Buzz De Kemp, brought him to wrath. Just as Helen Fontaine did before."

"It's as simple as that, eh?"

"Don't be angry, dear one." She frowned, in puzzlement. "It has never been so sweeping, before." Her face cleared. "Perhaps, he has never been so provoked in the past."

"But look, how can he *do* these things?"

"But he's the Speaker of the Word, the guru of the Path to Elysium, and the beloved of the All-Mother."

"Oh, great," Ed muttered, in suffering. "Ask a silly question and get a silly answer."

Involuntarily, he put out a hand and rested it on her arm. "Now look, Nefertiti, this is important."

Her eyes narrowed slightly and her mouth seemed to go sweetly slack. He jerked his hand back.

"Pardon me!"

Her voice was throaty, "It was all right."

He cleared his own throat. He wondered how old Nefertiti Tubber was. It came to him that the girl had possibly never had a man touch her before. Not a man of her own age group. Holy smokes, in *this* age?

"Look," he said again. "I keep getting the impression every time I get talking with you people that I came into the conversation half a dozen sentences late. Now just what is it that your old man, that is, your father, wants to accomplish? What's this stuff about the communists being too mild for him. Not radical enough?"

A voice behind him said, "Ah, we have a visitor."

Ed winced, expecting a thunderbolt between the shoulders. He turned.

The man who stood there, his face in the ultimate of understanding and sadness, looked about as dangerous as a Michelangelo depiction of the Virgin nursing the Child.

Ed Wonder, nevertheless, scrambled to his feet. "Ah, good afternoon sir . . . Ooops, pardon me, not sir, ah, Ezekiel, ah, dear one."

"Good afternoon, Edward." The gray-bearded prophet beamed at him. "You seek further enlightenment on the path to Elysium?" The older man sank with a sigh into one of the folding chairs. Evidently he bore no grudges whatsoever about the hassle of the other night.

Nefertiti had come to her feet too. Now she brought her father a glass of water which she had dipped out of a bucket. She walked, Ed Wonder noted, in spite of himself, as Malay women he'd seen on travelogue

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shows walked; head and shoulders proudly erect, the hips swaying gently.

"Well, ah, yes," Ed said hurriedly. "Fascinating subject. The way I get it, you're heading for a sort of Utopia. A . . . "

Ezekiel Joshua Tubber frowned. "Dear one, you have failed to understand the word. We seek no Utopia. Utopia is supposedly the perfect society and anything perfect has automatically ceased growing, hence the conception of Utopia is conservative if not reactionary. That is the mistake of many, including the so-called communists. They think that once *their* promised land has been achieved, all progress will stop. That the millennium will have been reached. Nonsense! The All-Mother knows no stopping. The path to Elysium is forever!"

For a while, there, Ed Wonder had thought he was following the old boy, but toward the end it had degenerated into gibberish.

However, Ed Wonder had dealt with twitches before. The fact that this one had the most far-out abilities that the radio man had ever run into was beside the point. Twitch he was. Ed said placatingly, "Yeah, well, the way you put it makes a lot of sense. Utopia is reactionary."

Tubber looked at him questioningly.

"I see, dear one, that possibly your motive for visiting us might be other than interest in the path." He smiled benignly and looked at Nefertiti, who hadn't taken her eyes from Ed Wonder during all this. She flushed. The girl, Ed decided, seemed to be in almost perpetual blush. She couldn't be as shy as all that.

Tubber said gently, "Could it be that you have come to spark my daughter?"

Gently it might have been said, but Ed Wonder barely managed to keep his seat. All instincts told him to be up. Up and away!

"Oh, no . . ." he protested. "Oh."

"Father!" Nefertiti said.

Ed didn't look at her. He suspected that Nefertiti Tubber was the color of new bricks, if she could go pink just looking at a man. He stuttered, "Oh, no. No. I just came about the television, the radio."

Ezekiel Joshua Tubber was frowning, though such was his face that it came over more kindly that might have another man's smile. He said sadly, "How unfortunate. Truly, the All-Mother's path to Elysium is brightened by the romancing of our young. And I fear that such is the life I lead my Nefertiti that she loses the opportunity to meet pilgrims of her own age." He sighed and said, "But what is this about television and radio? As you know, Edward, I have little sympathy with the direction our mass media have taken of recent years."

Ed was finding courage in the other's quiet manner. Tubber seemed to carry no grudge at all due to the fiasco at the station the other night. Ed said, "Well, you didn't have to take it to such extreme. This lack of sympathy."

Tubber was puzzled. "I don't believe I understand, dear one."

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Ed said impatiently, "The curse. The curse you put on television and radio. Holy smokes, don't tell me you've forgotten doing it!"

Tubber's eyes, bewildered, went from Ed to Nefertiti. She sat there, her rapt concentration on Ed waning slightly as apprehension began to grow.

She said, "Father you have probably forgotten but you became distraught the other night on Ed's radio program. You . . . called upon the power to curse it."

Ed blurted, "And now there's not a TV or radio station in the world still operating."

Tubber looked at the two of them, blankly. "You mean that I called down wrath upon these admittedly perverted institutions and . . . it *worked*?"

"It worked, all right," Ed said glumly. "And now I'm out of a job. Several million people in the industry, in one part of the world or another are out of jobs."

"*All* the world?" Tubber said.

"Oh, father," Nefertiti protested. "You know you have the power. Remember the young man who continually practiced his hill billy music on his guitar?"

Tubber was staring fascinatedly at Ed Wonder. He said to his daughter, "Yes, but breaking five guitar strings at a distance of a few hundred feet is certainly nothing . . ."

Nefertiti said, "Or the neon sign that you complained made your eyes feel as though they were about to pop out."

Ed said, "You mean you didn't know it worked? That you cursed radio and now there's not a station, radio *or* TV, that isn't on the blink?"

Tubber said in awe, "The powers the All-Mother can delegate are indeed wonderous."

"They're wonderous all right," Ed said bitterly. "But the thing is can you reverse them? People are getting desperate. Why, in just a little town like this, thousands are roaming the streets. Nothing to do. Why even a little tent meeting like yours is packed to the limit and . . ."

He let the sentence dribble away. The face of Ezekiel Joshua Tubber had suddenly gone tragically empty.

Tubber said, "You mean . . . dear one . . . that the large crowds I have suddenly been attracting. The capacity audiences so that I must hold a dozen talks a day. They appear . . ."

Ed said bitterly, "They appear because they haven't any place else to go and be entertained."

Nefertiti said in soft compassion, "Father, I was going to tell you. Multitudes of people are roaming up and down the streets. They are desperate for amusement."

Tubber's homely face, broken for a moment, was now slowly regaining strength. "Amusement!"

Ed said "Ezekiel, don't you see? People have to do something with their time. They want to be entertained. They want to have a little fun. That's reasonable, isn't it? They like radio, they like TV. And you can't stop them. So, okay, they don't know what to do with themselves. They've go to have some way to kill time."

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"Kill time! Kill time!" Tubber rumbled. "Killing time is not murder, dear one. It is suicide! We are committing racial suicide with our meaningless, empty lives. Man must resume the path to Elysium, not seek methods of wasting life away!"

Ed said, "Yea, but don't you see, ah, dear one? People don't want to listen to your message. They're well conditioned. They want to be entertained. And you can't stop them. Okay, take away their TV and radio and . . . "

Even as he spoke, caught up in the argument, Ed Wonder knew he had already said too much. Ezekiel Joshua Tubber was swelling in anger.

"Yes?" he thundered. "Take away their TV and radio and what will they do?"

Ed tried to cut it off, but the old man's strength gripped him almost as though physically. Gripped him and demanded. He said, "And they'll turn to things like movies."

"Oh, they will!"

Ed Wonder closed his eyes in pain.

A new voice broke in. "There's a fresh audience, dear one. We have ushered the last group from the tent, and a new one awaits you to hear the expounding of the word."

Ed looked up. It was one of the faithful, whom he had noticed earlier at the entrance to the main tent.

Tubber stood erect, some seven feet tall, Ed Wonder estimated. At least seven feet tall, and pushing three hundred pounds.

"Ah, they do, do they? Well, hear the word they shall!"

Ed Wonder, stricken dumb, looked at Nefertiti. She sat there, elbows tight against her side, as though in feminine protest at the masculine psychic power emanating from her father.

The prophet stormed from the tent.

Ed looked back at the girl again. All he could think of to say was, "I'm glad I didn't mention carnivals and circuses."

Nefertiti shook her head. "Father loves circuses," she said.

They sat there for a time, waiting. Neither knowing for how long. In their silence, they could hear sounds from the larger tent, and finally the swelling thunder of Tubber's voice.

Nefertiti began to say something, but Ed interrupted her. "I know," he said. "He's speaking in wrath."

She nodded dumbly.

The voice reached a pitch.

Ed said, "The power." He added, dismally. "And I was looking forward to seeing that production, *Ben Hur Rides Again.*"

He guessed right, all right. Oh, he had guessed right, all right.

The proof came as he tooled the little Volkshover back into Kingsburg. For the first time in his life, Ed Wonder came upon a lynch mob. A shouting, screaming, hate-smelling crowd milling about in the ever confusion of the mob. Screaming for someone to get a rope. Screaming to go to the park to find the limb of a tree. Counter-screaming that a lamppost would do. Somewhere in the center, a mewling, fear-overcome, victim was struggling in the grasps of a wild-faced, glaring-of-eye trio

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who seemed the leaders of the riot, if a lynch mob can be said to have leaders.

Ed could have lifted above the demonstration and gone on, all his instincts, all his fear of physical violence, told him to get away from the vicinity immediately, to get away but fast, to personal safety. But the sheer fantasy of the action held him in fascination. He dropped to the street level and stared.

There must have been fully five hundred of them, and their rage was a frenzy. The yelling and shouting, the shrilling from the women members of the mob — all of it made nonsense.

Ed shouted to a passing participant of the demonstration, "What the devil's going on! Where's the police?"

"We run the police off," the raging pedestrian screamed back at him, and was gone.

Ed Wonder continued to stare.

Somebody said, "The natives are restless tonight, eh? Come on, Little Ed, let's get in there. They'll kill that poor bastard."

Ed swiveled his head. It was Buzz De Kemp. He looked back at the screaming crowd again. "You think I'm completely around the bend?" His stomach had tightened in terror at the very idea of getting nearer to the raging.

"Somebody's got to help him," Buzz growled. He pulled the stogie from his mouth and threw it into the gutter. "Here goes nothing." He started for the mob.

Ed Wonder vaulted over the side of the hovercar and took a few steps after him. "Buzzo! Use your head!" The other didn't look back. He disappeared into the swirling crowd.

Ed grabbed a bystander who seemed a fellow observer of the scene, rather than a participant.

"What's happened!" Ed demanded.

From the distance came the ululations of fire sirens.

The other looked at Ed, brushed his hand away. "Movie projectionist," he shouted, above the roar.

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"Folks standing in line for hours, then he fouls up the projector and claims he can't fix it."

Ed Wonder stared at him. "You mean they're hanging that man because his projector broke down? Nobody's *that* kooky!"

The other growled, defensively, "You don't know, buddy. Everybody's like on edge. These folks were standing for hours some of them, to see this here show. And the son of a bitch louses up the movie machine."

Something he was going to find difficult to explain for the rest of his life, happened to Ed Wonder. Something snapped. His mind, suddenly empty of the fear of the crowd, urged him into an action he wouldn't have dreamed of, two minutes earlier. He began pushing through the mob after Buzz De Kemp, trying to get to the center.

He could hear himself yelling at the top of his voice. "It's not his fault! It's not his fault! It's like the TV and radio. It's all over the world. Every movie projector in the world is on the blink. It's not his fault! All movies don't work! All movies don't work!"

Somehow, impossibly, he struggled his way to the screaming crowd's middle where the three burly mob leaders were dragging their victim in the direction of the nearest lamp post. By this time, a rope had been found.

He could feel his voice cracking as he tried to make himself heard above the mob's roar. "It's not his fault! All movies don't work!"

One of the mob leaders back-armed him into a sprawl. He wondered vaguely where Buzz De Kemp was, even as he pushed himself back to his feet and grabbed at the fear-paralyzed movie projectionist. "It's not his fault! All movies don't work!"

It was then that the pressurized water hit them.

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COMING OUT PARTY

by ROBERT LORY

Every girl deserves a coming-out party—but coming out of what?

Illustrated by NODEL

Beverly stretched her long, nude body to its fullest height before the large mirror and twirled around gaily.

"Oh, Mother, oh, Father — the Juno Cotillion!" she said. "I'm so thrilled."

Mother and Father looked up at her with admiration. "We too are thrilled," Mother said. "It isn't every day our child makes her debut."

"Oh, what a glorious night it will be," Beverly sang. "To come out — to officially enter society at long last. I'm the happiest girl on Earth!"

Mother smiled knowingly. "Yes — how well I remember my own coming out."

Beverly looked lovingly upon her little mother. "How does it feel? What I mean is, how does it feel to know you're really a part of the world around you?"

"You feel — *free,* is the best word, I suppose," Mother said.

"Free," Beverly repeated. "Oh, yes, free! When I think about it, I could simply *burst* with anticipation!"

Father laughed. "You'd better control yourself a little. Making your debut doesn't give you *absolute* freedom, you know."

Beverly danced over to Father and patted his head. "Father, I assure you, I'll always remain your good, little girl."

A glum look came over Father and he left the room.

"Mother — I'm sorry. I didn't mean to hurt Father's feelings," Beverly said.

A tear dropped from Mother's eye. "I know. It's just that your father wanted a boy so much. I remember the day the astrologer told us. You were just a fertilized egg then, when the interpreter of the stars consulted his charts, suspended an amulet over your incubating fetus, and told us you'd be a girl. Father was crushed."

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Beverly smiled fondly at the doorway Father had used in leaving. "Poor, dear Father. The astrologers never have been wrong yet, have they?"

"Astrology, darling, is an *exact* science," Mother admonished. "All the really great civilizations of this world knew that, and while some of our younger set talk as if they think otherwise, it's just their bad upbringing showing. I certainly hope you'll keep away from that crowd. Your father and I have set our sights high for you. We went to considerable expense to have you come out at the Juno Cotillion. See that you continue to make us as proud of you as we are now."

"I'm sorry, Mother. Sometimes I just feel — different, sort of."

Mother smiled. "Nonsense. If you

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were different, you'd never have made the Juno Cotillion."

"I do hope the orchestra plays some of the old songs." Mother said to Father. They sat with the rest of the parents in a long balcony that overlooked the dance floor.

Father grunted. "If those noise-makers down there were playing on key, you'd recognize the fact they are playing the old songs. The Juno Cotillion be damned!"

Mother was no longer listening. She never listened when Father knocked the established way of doing things. Her eyes were fixed on the ripples in the sea of bare flesh that moved gracefully over the beautiful dance floor below.

Beverly was dancing with a girl almost as tall as she. But, Mother reflected, just almost. Not only were all the rest shorter than her daughter, but none of the nude bodies turning and cavorting to the music could match Beverly's in beauty and strength. *We've given her a splendid body,* Mother was thinking, *but I pray her mind has developed as well.* Sometimes, Mother said to herself, Beverly does act — different.

The orchestra's change in tune stopped Mother's unpleasant thoughts.

"It's time," she told Father, who in spite of his determination to have a bad disposition, focused his attention on the line of girls awaiting the call of names.

He held Mother close to him. "It is, after all, our little girl down there."

The call of names began. Applause broke out from the balcony as each girl in her turn officially came out and was accepted as a member of society. And then it was Beverly's name that was called

Beverly walked gracefully to the middle of the floor. The applause grew greater as her face began to contort.

Mother gasped. "She's frightened. She's going to spoil it!"

Beverly's naked body shook, completely out of time with the slow music the orchestra was playing. Then it happened. Her body slumped downward, and she lay there, face upward. Her eyes closed in pain, her hands tore at her ears. Over the crashing applause a piercing scream sounded, and from the open mouth of the now-lifeless body on the floor — Beverly came out, her twelve stubby legs proudly finding their balance.

The hall filled with screams then. Not of horror — but of surprise, then of congratulations to Father and Mother.

"My Beverly," Mother cried. "All this time — eighteen long months — incubating in the best human money could buy from any of the slave camps, and she's —— she's —"

Father's green antennae clapped in joy at the sight of the lone green spot in the swarm of orange spider-like debutantes who now were feeding on the dead bodies of the young females whose species, before the invasion, had ruled planet Earth.

"Our Beverly, Mother — and she's no she. She's green, not orange. Astrology be hanged, it's a boy!"

END

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THE SHAPE OF US TO COME

by Michael Girsdansky

Here's how today's most dreaded scourge may be tomorrow's best hope for man's conquest of space!

"Lord, we know what we are, but we know not what we may be." *Hamlet*, IV1, 41-42.

Changing the shape of Man has been one of the semi-standard themes of science fiction, usually to fit the demands of some other world —though not always. Thus, in book and article Jacques-Yves Cousteau has speculated on altering some of us to *Homo aquaticus* for life in the oceans of Earth itself.

Sometimes the postulated changes are assumed to be the result of natural selection.

Perhaps less common is the idea of deliberately reconstructing humanity. Simak's and Anderson's manufactured Jovians are cases in point, as are Van Vogt's more flexible "silkies": creatures equally at home in sea, deep space, and (in human form) on dry land.

When the changes are attributed to evolution, they naturally enough breed true. The new creatures are in fact a new species. But when alterations are man-made, what the offspring would be has remained a moot point. The human-created or human-

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origin Jovian, Venerian, Martian, E. Eridanian, or even terrestrial merman is usually assumed to produce children of the new kind. Sometimes, however, the author describes the poignant and lethal quandry in which the altered human beings produce "normal" children whose traditionally *Homo sapiens* bodies are unable to survive in an off-Earth environment. This latter problem is sometimes side-stepped by assuming that changes are feasible only before the new individual comes into existence, with transformation of the reproductive cells prior to fertilization. Often the plot-lines of stories based on this premise stress the heartbreaks of the separation of one generation from the next. Those of Earth stand safely behind glass and watch their unlike sons and daughters inherit a world that the oldsters can never know without oxygen-mask and/or protective suiting. The children themselves will hear of blue skies, feathered creatures called birds, and a third planet of another sun—if they are told of the distant world at all—only as hearsay booming from loudspeakers.

There is another possibility, but it has largely been passed by, probably because until recently it seemed so unlikely. Here, the adult is changed and his hereditary potential is changed with him. Children born of the altered stock share in the changes produced in their originally Earth-human parents. Since this notion smacks vaguely of the inheritance of acquired characteristics, Lamarckianism and Lysenko, speculative thinkers and writers have generally ducked this possibility like the plague.

But oddly enough, if deliberate adaption of the human animal ever does take place, it will quite possibly be this seemingly *verboten* type that occurs.

No matter what kind of man-made changes have been assumed, one thing was always sure from Stapledon to Simak, Verne to Van Vogt: vagueness. If the new breed was built up from altered cells, there might be a bit of plausible patter about "genetic engineering," "cellular micromanipulation," or "chromosomal surgery." If the adult human was to be re-made, there was often verbal sleight-of-hand involving "body reconstruction," "protoplasmic transformers," "enzyme adaptors" and the like. No matter, though. In the end they all came down to what an older generation of playwrights used to call Noises Offstage.

Such vagueness may have been justified till fairly recently, but within the last decade or so there have been advances that make the s-f dream of human re-designing more than just an intriguing plot-device. The gains now point toward paths which can be followed with at least hope of ultimate success: paths which somehow join the legend of an ancient Mediterranean king, an 18th Century English physician, a 19th Century French chemist, and 20th Century cancer research. And viruses — oh, by all means viruses!

Ancient writers credited Mithradates of Pontus (163-120 B.C.) with a planned policy of self-damage.

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Fearing assassination by poison with particular horror, he supposedly had his system loaded with all the known toxins of the day. Beginning with tiny, non-lethal dosings, he finally acquired an immunity that would protect a herd of paranoid elephants. (An almost certainly apocryphal tale maintains that when at last he did wish to die, Mithradates had to call in a soldier to run him through.)

Not all poisons are man-made, however; many are produced by the bacteria that cause the diseases which have wrought havoc throughout human history. Even before the germ theory of disease, the Englishman Edward Jenner used an essentially Mithradates-like approach to smallpox. An approach which worked. In fact, he did something which today might land him in jail. Noticing that the relatively mild disease cowpox seemed to confer a lasting immunity to the smallpox so dreaded in his time, he took some material from a cowpox-infected milkmaid and injected it into an eight-year-old boy. Then he infected the boy with smallpox, and waited for the outcome.

The child did not die, Jenner was not jailed, and eventually vaccination became commonplace.

A little more than half a century later, Louis Pasteur picked up the basic idea and produced a practical means of innoculation and immunization against many diseases, hydrophobia the most spectacular among them. Since then, Pasteur's method has been generalized and culminated in the work of Drs. Salk and Sabin which has largely made polio a historical footnote. The basic technique has remained the same since Jenner's day: use of a watered-down form of the infectious substance to build up the body's defenses, which then produce antibodies to protect against a full-scale future attack of the disease.

But what of those disorders variously called "familial," "hereditary," or "genetic"? At present, science can offer nothing much but alleviation of symptoms and sympathy for the afflicted: insulin for the diabetic, a restricted diet for the phenylketonuric (who will otherwise grow feeble-minded), mild training for the color-blind, and whatever pity and care we can offer to those damned with Huntington's chorea as the patient sinks into inevitable psychosis. A. E. Houseman might have been thinking of these ills when he wrote that "The troubles of our proud and angry dust are of eternity and shall not fail."

But it now appears that eventually these troubles may fail, after all. It is just possible that at least some of these diseases may truly be cured, both in the patient and in his descendants.

And the knowledge that makes that possible may one day allow Man to walk about on alien worlds in comfort and make his home there.

Long before the day of the electron microscope, long before DNA was thought of as anything but an old protein fraction of salmon sperm, an English physiologist named Garrod hit on the key. Trying to find a common denominator for the entire class of hereditary dis-

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eases, he summed them up in the phrase, "Inborn errors of metabolism." Even if only a single misstep occurred in the processing of only one substance, the repercussions could snowball to produce an avalanche of catastrophe.

About the same time that Garrod set forth his theory at the turn of the century, Morgan, de Vries and others re-discovered the forgotten work of the monk Gregor Mendel, who had unearthed some fascinating facts about inheritance while fiddling with pea plants in his monastery's garden. From then on, study of what the mechanisms were that lay behind the word "heredity" gathered speed. Biology had found itself a seemingly unalterable unit — analogous to the atom of physics — which was promptly dubbed "gene."

With time the atom proved not to be unalterable. Parts were added and subtracted with results that became apparent in the summer sky over Hiroshima. In biology, however, progress was slower. Not only did the gene remain apparently unchangeable, it remained unknowable. The word itself was merely an operational term, a scientific metaphor arrived at to explain that certain inherited traits seemed to remain constant and to re-shuffle over the generations as separate entities. Morgan, himself, one of the pioneers in genetics, stalwartly refused even to speculate on what the physical or chemical reality might be behind the word. The popularizers of science liked to describe the genes as beads strung out along the length of the chromosomes, those ropey objects found in the nuclei of cells; but no one had ever seen a gene, still fewer hoped to see one.

But science moves faster than second-guessers can anticipate. Thanks to Watson, Crick and a handful of others (most of whom have won Nobel prizes for their work) we now have considerable insight into what a gene is—and is not.

One of the things a gene is *not* is a bead-like particle. Rather, it appears that a gene is an area, a limited grouping of molecules along the lengthy strands of nucleic acid which carries the genetic instructions (code) for each species of life, as well as directing the assembly of organic material within the individual cells themselves. (Of the two varieties of nucleic acid which Life uses to transmit data, DNA—deoxyribonucleic acid—is by far the most common. In certain bacteria and viruses, RNA—ribonucleic acid—fulfills the same function.)

The "alphabet" the nucleic acids use to specify the proteins that make up any given species' individuality is only four "letters" (chemical compounds) long. Since there are easily hundreds of thousands of proteins, the problem of using only four different substances to characterize them seems difficult. In fact it is not. After all, in writing English we have much the same problem: how to transcribe more than half a million distinct words with a battery of only twenty-six different characters. The trick lies in the combining.

With only four separate chemical characters, nucleic acid does succeed in specifying effectively. It man-

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ages because (1) the countless proteins are built up of only twenty-two separate amino acids, and (2) the amino acids themselves can be determined by the four chemical compounds, or bases, that are the alphabet of the nucleic acids. Taking the four bases three at a time—which seems to be the way that nature takes them—one gets 64 separate triplets. More than enough, by three times almost, to give a code-name to each of the twenty-two amino acids. Furthermore, the arrangement of these groups-of-three along a strand of nucleic acid determines the sequence of amino acids that will go to make up a specific protein.

The surplus of 64 possible combinations over the twenty-two amino acids which in truth exist appears to provide a safety factor which may well be a godsend. Considering the number of disruptive factors—cosmic rays, earth-born radioactivity, certain chemicals—it is all to the good that more than just one three-compound group names a given amino acid. Otherwise, any chance jolt of influence, physical or chemical, might so distort things as to send a prospective paramecium along the road to being a petunia, a man on the road to being a mollusc. As it is, it would take a rather thoroughgoing set of coincidences to swerve the transmission of hereditary data from its path.

Yet it can happen, given long enough time. And it can survive, if the changes are advantageous enough.

All well and good—but being able to read the genetic code is not the same as correcting erroneous genes, the problem inherent in a true cure of hereditary disease. Nor is it the same thing as the creation of introduction of new genes (base-sequences) into Earth-normal reproductive material. (This last would be needed to adapt Man to another world or set of worlds.)

And that is where we come full circle, back to the days of Mithradates and Jenner—to the notion of using a disease to improve the health of a potential victim. For here we come to the question of viruses.

As we've learned to our cost, many an obviously infectious disease —polio encephalitis, measles, mumps and so forth—is virus-caused. And there is increasing evidence that other, more obscure, disorders are also related to virus activity: among them, numerous so-called hereditary diseases.

The reason why viruses can, and do, occupy such debatable territory is that they are *not* simply smaller copies of the standard germ. They are something of a radically different kind. There is a hint of this in the virus' scientific nicknames, "wild gene" and "heredity in search of a body."

The bacterium—germ—is, after all, basically a cellular creature not too different from ourselves. The beast is sticky with protoplasm, chock-full of chromosomes, and burdened with those metabolic needs that mark standard life from the amoeba to the anthropologist.

The virus is something else again: a strand of DNA or RNA bundled

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up in a protective protein jacket. Outside a living cell of some sort, such a virus has none of the attributes of a living creature. It can even be reduced to a collection of inert crystals, drenched in a solvent and then "revived."

What makes for the peculiarity of a virus is that the infectious part is not "body-plus-soul" (jacket-plus-nucleic-acid), but only the acid core itself. The virus envelope is left behind on the outside as the nucleic acid burrows in, de-activates the victim-cell's DNA, and then "re-programs" the cellular apparatus for the manufacture of as many as two or three hundred replicas of the virus's original nucleic acid core and—a little later—the protein jackets. The dirty work done and the cell thoroughly out of commission, the viruses disperse, to resume the cycle.

What holds out hope for Man, however, is the fact that not all viruses reproduce in such a simple-minded way. Most important in terms of future progress are the twin phenomena of "lysogeny" and "transduction."

Lysogeny is that process by which certain cells (bacteria) show the ability to make a separate peace with specific invaders. In a lysogenic situation, viruses are actually incorporated into the hereditary material and machinery of the cell, rather than reproducing as individual particles. To all intents and purposes, the virus is now simply a set of genes. True, this gene-virus (technically known as "prophage") does reproduce itself—but only in the same tempo as to the cell itself: i.e., it divides into two identical parts when the cell prepares to split. Thus, all subsequent generations of cell share the original invasive prophage. Thanks to lysogeny, therefore, the supposedly impossible—inheritance of an acquired characteristic—turns out not to be so impossible as we thought.

That the lysogenized gene-virus is in fact still a virus—even after many a generation of bacterial camouflage—can be shown when the descendant cells are subjected to irradiation or treatment with certain chemical substances. Apparently such treatment disarms whatever chemicals there are that enable lysogenic bacteria to establish a semi-friendly relationship with given viruses. In any case, distinct and independent virus particles are once more produced within the great-great-to-the-Nth-power daughters of the originally "infected" cell and they break out to take up individual existence all over again.

The interesting part is this: it is just those types of radiation or chemical which de-lysogenize bacteria which are the classic producers of mutations in other forms of life.

Question: Is it possible that *all* genes, in *every* form of life, are in some way the lysogenized descendants of an original experiment in cell-virus togetherness?

Such an explanation might go far to unriddle the mystery of deletion (the loss of genes) often noticed in mutational changes. If such is the case, it may be that the loss of genetic material is simply a case of "normal" genes reverting to what they once were long, long ago: independent viruses.

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Another question, somewhat related to the last: Does lysogeny contribute anything of value to the cell that takes the virus(es) in? Granted that the virus material literally becomes part of the hereditary material of the invadee—but does it simply go along for the ride, doing no harm but no good either, or does it help its vehicle in the fight for existence?

Transduction gives a possible clue to the answer.

Transduction can be thought a lysogeny-like process in which a virus robs a bacterial Peter to pay a bacterial Paul. Having entered one type of bacterium, a virus may attach itself to a part of the victim's gene-system and carry a fragment over to a new species of germ. This led-across ("transduced") material then becomes part of the new cell's hereditary apparatus . . .

. . . Becomes part of the new cell's hereditary apparatus—and produces changes in the descendant-cells which stem from the inheritance of the first, "robbed," cell.

To date, there have been no recorded instances in which a transducing virus has changed bacterium-type-one into bacterium-type-two. The total high-jacking of hereditary material would be a rather formidable task for a particle as small as a virus, after all; and so far only the transduction of specific traits has been observed. Then, too, although a tiny virus (plus its relatively small cargo of genetic material) can sneak into a cell without smashing it to pieces, there is doubtless a limit to how much can be stuffed into the somewhat cramped quarters of a cell already crammed with nucleus and nucleoli, mitochondria and cytoplasm.

Nonetheless, given enough ingenuity, species-A can in all truth be changed to species-B: at least theoretically. And here, that "given enough ingenuity" is the important factor. The history of mankind would seem to show that anything possible in theory that Man has wanted badly enough, he has gotten. Often enough, indeed, he has thrown out the old theory and brought in a new one to justify results thought utterly impossible. (What else is much of the scientific method, anyway, but the shelving of theories that said X could not be—when it was?)

At least on the bacterial and protozoon level, then, species transmutation is a reality. Not only is the one-celled creature changed during its own existence, but it passes the changes on to descendant cells.

But Man is multicellular—a metazoan. Somatic (body) cells and germ plasm are kept rather rigidly compartmentalized. And being metazoan, how could we bring the needed changes to all the twenty-odd trillion cells of the human body, somatic or reproductive?

By adding a third factor to lysogeny and transduction, it may one day be just possible. That third factor is cancer.

Not too many years ago the idea of cancer as a virus-caused disease would have sent most doctors' eyebrows shooting up in fury through their dandruff. Too many kooks had

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spoiled too many culture-broths in the past, and the underworld of quackery is fuller of "cancer-germ men" than a bog is with mosquitoes. But even as early as 1911, Dr. Peyton Rous had shown that a virus was responsible for a tumor found in chickens: the Rous Sarcoma Virus (RSV). In the same year, a human but non-cancerous tumor—the common wart—was also found to be viral in origin. Since then, the number of cancers which have been laid at the doorstep of virus is little short of uncanny.

So far, no virus has definitely been shown to cause human cancer. The obstacles to such proof are both technical and formidable. Basic is the problem: What are you going to use as the experimental animal? A given virus may produce different diseases depending on the species of animal infected. Thus, certain "adenoviruses" which—so far as we know—produce only mild respiratory infections in Man, can and do cause unmistakable cancer in hamsters. Conversely, it is possible that certain viruses widespread and harmless in other animals may produce cancer in us; but we shall not know it as long as experimentation is restricted to guinea pig, hamster and the like.

There have been some suggestive bits of evidence, however . . .

. . . The leukemia "epidemic" in Niles, Illinois, for instance. A rather amazingly large number of children contracted the blood disease, and the one common factor was that all had attended (or had brothers and sisters who had attended) the same school.

The chances of so many cases of leukemia clustering together in a town the size of Niles by chance alone are astronomic. They may have been nothing more than coincidence. Given enough coin-tossers, sooner or later someone is going to flip fifty heads or tails in a row. (Down, Dr. Rhine! Down, I say, sir!) But there was also a rather odd outbreak of an unplaceably vague rheumatic-fever-like condition at about that time. The latter was definitely viral in origin—and as already mentioned, viruses have a sneaky way of causing now one condition, now another. Thus, in retrospect, certain present-day sufferers from Parkinson's disease may have shown an off-beat reaction to the virus which caused the 'flu epidemic of World War I times; at least, such seems the case in light of medical histories gathered over the decades since 1918.

. . . Then there is the "Burkitt tumor." Cancer, this time, and no mistake. A cancer of small children. The victims generally develop immense tumors in the jaw, along the digestive tract and in the reproductive organs, usually dying within two to four months, though a few may survive for as long as a year.

But this tumor is found only in certain geographical belts, and almost always these lie in Africa. It can't be something "hereditary," for East Indian and European children come down with it, as well as the indigenous Negroes. The common denominator is a certain type of terrain: low in altitude, high in both temperature and humidity. In terms of ecology, one gets the suspicion the disease

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could be insect-borne—by a mosquito, say. Today an awfully large amount of effort is being spent trying to find the virus which quite likely causes at least this one type of human cancer.

And if this type, why not others as well? A virus particle which appears staggeringly often in the blood of leukemia patients has recently been reported in the medical press. It may be a false alarm—virus news is breaking very fast indeed on the medico-biochemical front these days—but Dr. Wendell M. Stanley, who won a Nobel prize for his pioneer work with viruses, is on record as stating that it will be amazing if viruses do not play a role in human cancer.

Cancer virus(es)? Quite possible. Remember, cancer is essentially growth that no longer obeys the logic of the victim's species. A malignant tumor is definitely not part of the programmed gestalt of its surroundings. An invading virus, we have already seen, can commandeer the cell's metabolic and reproductive machinery. If virus is one of the primal causes of cancer, it would plausibly act by usurping the genetic coding apparatus which also determines function, shape, pattern, person. One can dare to say it in a magazine devoted to s-f: cancer is in some ways a disease which makes of Man's substance something which is no longer strictly human.

Not too long ago, British TV presented the story of a rocket pilot who came back from the first human-crewed trip into truly deep space. Something Out There apparently infected him and through the next few installments, the luckless astronaut devolved into a few tons of shapeless jelly sixty feet across (it ate everything!) which eventually nested in the rafters of Westminster Abbey, preparing to sporulate and conquer the world.

No need to postulate anything so spectacular. On this Earth of ours we have a condition which does on a smaller scale much what the unnamable Thing did in the BBC's horror story. Some of the particular fear which the word "cancer" calls up may stem, not from hopelessness, but from the unspoken knowledge that in its terminal form, cancer is a killing of ourselves. Not suicide in the legal or moral sense, but nonetheless a state in which one part of us murders the remainder. (Something of this feeling lies at the heart of that particularly morbid dwelling on the American Civil War—oops! War Between the States: an organic and indissoluable Union in the throes of dissolution.)

That cancer is scourge and tragedy is a truism. But so, too, was it a truism of smallpox, and rabies, and polio. Yet Jenner, Pasteur, Salk, and Sabin took the raw stuffs of these diseases, tamed them, and then used them to protect Man against the very diseases which produced the material for vaccines to begin with.

Will this someday be possible with cancer? Tamed — then cured?

Prematurity can be dangerous, but there is more than a little informed and guarded optimism among those

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at the frontiers of research. The feeling that biomedical science is within measurable distance of a break-through is all but inescapable.

If and/or when we master cancer, we shall quite probably have taken a giant step toward the dream of human plasticity. Cancerous growth is wild and ultimately deadly—but what if somehow we learn from it insight into how our bodies shape themselves? If human cancer viruses can be found, tamed, and altered—or even if "canceroid" viruses are actually built from synthesized nucleic-acid-plus-protein-jacket — what then?

Dreams of off-world adaption aside, we may regain a gift that flatworms and salamanders still have but we have lost: regeneration. Taming, using, or manufacturing a semi-living particle which could induce a controlled form of new growth, we could generate new limbs, organs, when the originals were lost through accident or the ravages of disease. Even the disease of cancer itself.

That would be enough, but there might be more . . .

. . . There might come a day when we find a world ripe for the taking —except that the gravity of 2 g's, the partial pressure across the alveoli of the lungs is too much for human lungs to take, the ultraviolet tearing through the atmosphere is enough to kill even a Congolese, and a good baker's-dozen of other defects make the world something less than paradise. What then?

Perhaps a good long course of perfusion with tamed (or manufactured) cancer virus: wild genes that —like a roving bachelor—can be talked into domesticity. Such treatment would mean not only that the subjects could change, but that their offspring would be born with the changes. Remember: though bacteria simply attack cells on a large-scale level, or poison them with by-products of germ-metabolism, viruses actually insinuate themselves into the cell's machinery.

The ability of viruses to produce changes which can be passed to future generations should not be too much of a surprise. Nor that fact that even a twenty-trillion-celled creature such as Man could be changed. The reason: a living creature is not a funnel, but a whirlpool; not a being, but a becoming. Folklore says our fabric is completely replaced every seven years, but in fact it happens much more quickly. The red-blood cell lasts for only about four months—and even bone, an arch-conservative of body material, shows a complete turnover long before the fabled seven years are done.

Our substance changes quickly. Only the pattern remains. Since nucleic acid is the genetic and cell-directing key, and since the web that is Man is re-woven very quickly indeed, changes in adult and in child-to-be would be easier to understand.

The answer lies in the fact that "mutation"—an old s-f friend—is not confined to the egg and sperm of reproductive organs. Often overlooked is "somatic mutation"—continuing change in the body. In the adult, child, or even the already conceived fetus, a random swipe of radiation, chemical influence, or—

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who knows?—even virus can change any one of the cells which lie in the body at large. The change can spread, since even body-cells reproduce by division, and produce a truly new kind of tissue in the immediately surrounding area. The mole that "springs out of nowhere"; the rare person with piebaldism; the good-looking brunette with a joltingly white blaze running through black hair—even some cases of dwarfism —all are possibly cases of change induced in those who already had begun to exist, rather than instances of change in the material that makes a new generation.

A somatic mutation, of course, is as likely to die with innovator as is a genetic one. Whatever the cause of the change, it is not likely to hit both a body-cell and a reproductive cell. Even if it manages to, by some fluke, it is supremely improbable that it will have altered the same gene-control area in both. (Thus, a mutation-causing agent making a double hit might produce dark pigmentation at a body location, yet hit the sperm or egg cell to turn descendants into seal-finned monstrosities.)

. . . But what if there is a deliberate and massive in-pouring of the altering influence?

The Russians have been using the technique of extended sleep in treating various psychoneurotic disorders. Whatever their results in improving mental health, they have managed to keep men somnolescent for weeks at a time. Given improvement in drugged-sleep treatment, together with the systematic administration of cell-changing virus, there is no reason why mutations which are somatic to begin with have to be limited to a few square or cubic inches of tissue—or limited to the area outside the reproductive organs.

Since all the material of the body is eventually replaced there is no reason why vaccinated virus should not re-make, after a while, even the genetic instructions for that part of the body which in turn passes genetic instructions on to offspring. The classic dogma that body-cells and reproductive cells are totally isolated from one another may be only that: dogma. With the long-term infiltration of gene-changing virus and the perpetual, rather quick turnover in tissue substance, all parts of ourselves may be changed. Even those parts which set down the pattern for children.

In the case of sperm, which are seemingly a continual off-budding within the male, the transition would probably begin at the level of the sperm-creating cells in the body itself. In contrast, ova—eggs—produced by women seem to be implicit within the female body even at the moment of birth. For women, therefore, the change-over would consist of gradual replacement, "infection," of already-formed tissue: the eggs themselves. But male or female, no matter the stage at which change-over took place, the transformation could come about.

The redesigning of Man to fit him for new circumstances is not around the corner. Human ignorance in this sphere is at the moment well-nigh perfect, though not quite. We

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do know a little—we shall know more.

The conservative temptation is to assume that it will take at least a century to master the shaping of ourselves, if it ever comes. But technology runs ahead of even the wildest guessings—always. The total distance flown by the first airplane at the turn of our century was less than the wingspread of a bomber built in the 1940's; one of the Wright brothers lived to witness the age of the sputnik.

How many years will it take till we achieve the goal of regeneration, re-shaping? We cannot tell yet. Perhaps 500 years, 100, 75, 25, 10. But the question is almost certainly when, not whether. There will come the time. As the instructions for alteration in the programming of protein-synthesis spread from one cell . . . to the next . . . to the next . . . the patients quiescent in tube-fed, tube-cared-for, liquid-cushioned, and (perhaps) accelerated metabolic sleep . . . there will come the required changes in the flesh of their bodies and the potentialities for their children. As time passes, the virus particle will invade even those parts of us that make more of us.

The result? *H. sapiens eridani,* perhaps, remade from our seed and carrying it, remaking the youngsters who will walk under a new sky.

It may be that in this way an altered mankind will find a capacity for joy and sorrow on a world that we of Earth could never call Home. A world that the Old Adam of us would find impossible even to walk on.

Parents and chidren will be very far away from our puny world, and even the old-timers, who once lived on that other muddy ball, may not miss the change. It will have been something long ago, on a world much too overcrowded, where each man's face was in the next man's armpit.

The children will be happier still; the glory around them will be the only thing they have ever known. And their familiar, alien-memoried parents will do the best they can. The best that can be done, no matter what. With their altered bodies, these former-Earthmen will walk hand-in-hand with wisely innocent children under a different sun — doing the age-old things that parents have always done ever since mammal mother cuddled mammal child: teaching, guarding, cherishing and loving. END

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WORLD OF THE SPECTRUM

by EMIL PETAJA

Illustrated by GIUNTA

In the World of the Spectrum every man knew his place—but what is the color of doom?

I

Back to back, Kor and Atlan of the Forests fought the Green Ones. Their serrated blades purloined light from the tropical dawn to dazzle the swamp creatures' stick-eyes.

"I told you the swamp path was folly." Atlan thrust steel into a Green One.

Kor showed white teeth out of a brown muscular face. "Then are the Seven Kingdoms for weaklings?"

The long claws of the swamp men dripped venom, but the bronzed Helden put their swords to good use, and presently the three Green

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Ones who didn't fall slithered off and sank into their lairs under the bog. Kor watched the evil-smelling bubbles rise over them through gray fen-mist as he sheathed his sword in the wide belt of his leather tunic.

Atlan, his comrade, grinned. His returning grin broke off when the far-off voices started up in his mind, like a turned-on switch:

"These heroic combats are not to my taste, but I suppose Tarzan-cum-Siegfried will always be popular with base-colors. Anyone mind if I switch to something else?"

"I'd like to follow Kor a little further."

Chuckle. *"My daughter is young, Gold Dorff. She still finds muscles and a handsome face intriguing."*

"We must indulge the child, by all means."

Kor's face grimmed from this strangeness until Atlan sent his fingertips across his biceps in a stinging slap. "What is it, comrade? Standing there, staring at nothing."

Kor decided again not to say anything. Even Atlan would laugh. Sometimes he yearned back for the days when they were boys together, swimming in the blue lagoons, hunting *selki* with bow and arrow. No mind-voices to plague him. No questions that had no answers.

They walked ahead through the blue trees.

"Well?" Atlan prompted.

"I was thinking of the Princess."

Atlan grinned. "So do all Helden youths. That's what keeps us fighting. But she is only a fantasy, a dream."

Kor made no comment; his long bare legs brushed fern fronds aside as they moved. Their sandals made no sound on the greensward; their hunt-stalk-kill teacher had taught them well.

Purple mists of morning shimmered into fast-mounting day heat; a low wind sang through the flute-trees.

When they reached the forest's edge and a wide clearing bisected the rearing tangle of trees, they could see the cliffs. They were high. Unassaultable, it was said. As if it was something vague and fanciful in a dream, the ever-fog moved away from the clifftop.

There it was. The fabled Castle of the Princess. For a brief eye-flick they gaped up at its dark battlements.

Then it was gone.

Kor swallowed. "I never doubted it. Now that I *know* she is up there I'm going up there!"

Atlan slapped his shoulder in a plea of sanity. "Nobody has ever made it up that cliff. It's impossible." He added: "I still think it was an illusion."

Kor grasped his hand. "Good-by, friend."

Atlan stared. "You're not going *now!*"

"As good a time as any."

"What shall I tell Liti?"

"Tell her I had to go. That is our life, after all, in the Forest Kingdom. To fight. To die."

"But —"

He left Atlan scowling after him in the middle of the clearing; he didn't look back.

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Questions seethed in his head as he moved onto rocky terrain and approached the foot of the escarpment. Most of the heroes had no time for such thoughts. Thoughts like: Where did his people come from? He had seen the animals in the forests give birth. Not so with the Helden and the others. They were suddenly *there* with the Care Women to foster until it was time for the Teachers to train them in their heroic skills. Their lives were rich with excitement and danger; a Helden seldom lived long, always on the swords' point of death from a thousand perils. The others seemed not to have time for questions. They lived, they fought, they loved, they died.

Not Kor.

Something plagued him on. He equated this something with the Princess and her Castle on the high misted cliff. She was said to be unbearably beautiful and she lived up there, remote and unattainable.

Every Helden day was a challenge to stay alive. Had it not been the Green Ones this morning, it might have been the fire-people, the Kelpies, the black Deevs—or worst of all, the blood-sucking Dracs who kept Helden herds to feed their young. Then why was Kor not satisfied, like Atlan? Liti loved him. He had the respect of his tribe. Wasn't that enough?

No.

To the others the Princess Sena was a myth, an enchanted goddess to fight for and die for. Her flowered symbol graced the Helden banner. But sometimes at night Kor *saw* her — he could swear he did. Her raven hair, her petal-like face, her lake-blue eyes. She spoke to him on those nights. It was as though she had chosen him — Kor — out of all the tribes. She needed him urgently, to perform some unimaginable task. He could not fail her.

"What a tedious procedure! He will make it halfway up, then fall. Must we, Sena?"

"Just till he reaches the top, please?"

"But he won't. They never actually get in the Castle, it's not compatible with the legend. Right, Gold Dorff?"

"There might have been a recent revision. The Helden are too obvious. I leave them to assistants."

"Of course. Sena, we're boring our illustrious guest."

But as he climbed, Kor felt her mind move and cling to his, the way his hands clung to projecting shards. There were times when the cells of his muscular body screamed for him to let go and die. He dared not look back down. Or up. It was comforting to reach the tendrils of fog that hid the rock where it beetled out. His fingers found miraculous cracks and once, when his sandalled feet shot away and left him dangling he called out her name.

"Kor!" her mind called back. *"Hold on. I need you!"*

He yelled out. When he could move, he made his long body fling against the wetness of the rock and, somehow, his foot found a hold. But now the rock under his fingertips gave way. When it seemed miracles

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were ended his flailing hands clawed up and found roots, like snakes, a musty tangle of them. He grabbed, sobbing for air. The roots were slimy ropes for his inching fingers, then there was sod and grass, then his crooked elbow pivoted him up.

He lay sobbing gulps of air against the grass for a long moment, then sat up. Fog swirled damply around him so that at first he only saw the ragged cliffline through its blurring grayness. He felt the projection start to give way under him; he jumped back as it dropped away.

Every lithe muscle ached; it was agony to move one foot ahead of the other. But he had made it! Nobody had made it up the Castle-cliff before. Triumph put a new edge on his stamina. He heard a far-off bellow and stopped; his trained ears alert for danger. Then he saw the monster. Scaly, low-bellied, its tapering neck terminated in a head that seemed all glowing eyes and slavering jaws.

"An ancient dragon! How dull!"

"The base-colors love them. This one is right out of the old books. One must have a dragon guarding the Castle."

"If one must. Our oaf is persistent, I'll give him that. This attracts you, eh, Sena?"

"I love it when they finally get mangled or eaten."

Kor snapped his head vigorously to shake off the buzzing and gripped out his broadsword. The beast goggled at him and spat fire, swishing its tail in contemplation of a morsel. It let fly a trumpeting roar and charged.

The blast of fire-breath forced Kor back toward the cliff; his blade slashed across the triangle of belly. The beast roared again, weaving its head; then it had Kor up in its jaws.

"Happy, Sena?"

"Ecstatic!"

Kor screamed in pain, then swung limply back and forth as the dragon turned and moved ponderously back toward some lair hidden by a thicket of trees to enjoy his unexpected feast. When the pressure of those cutting teeth relaxed Kor gave a desperate lunge, driving his sword halfway into the creature's mouth-roof. The dragon bellowed; his jaw unhinged. Kor dropped heavily into the thick blue grass. He was bleeding in a dozen places. But he must not fail the Princess now. He slid agonizingly between the beast's stumps of legs and ran. He ran into the fog, blindly, until the dragon's ragings were only an echo on the wind. Then he flung himself down and pulled tearing breaths into his windpipe.

II

The fog came to an end, finally. He called out silently to the Princess and her anxious reply gave him a resurgence of hero-power.

"Hurry, Kor. I am waiting."

Scrambling over a hillock of lichened rock, he saw it. The Castle was purplish-black, grown over with moss and vines. The drawbridge was up, the ancient moat was a foul-smelling stagnance of green slime. With a long pull of thin air, Kor dove into the brackish scum. He

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pulled himself up onto the rocks at the foretower base; hugging wall, he circled until he reached a weed-grown garden with a small door where the round foretower met a flat vertical wall.

It was locked. He put his shoulder to it; hasps, locks, oxidized by brooding centuries, yielded. The door popped inward with a noise that echoed and reechoed down the silent dusty corridors. Kor stepped in it, coughing from the roiling dust. Motes spun and danced in some vagrant ray of light out of the fog-wrack, ghosts of ghosts.

He called her name. Echoes mocked him.

He moved past mailed sentries and into the great tower chamber. The silent dark was like a pressing weight. Once he touched a figure's mailplate; its helmet toppled off and clanked to the floor, followed by a rolling white skull. Kor shivered. In the great tower chamber tattered tapestries festooned the sombre walls, the gay hunting scenes and dances muted and molded by relentless time.

Kor's roving eyes dug the gloom from the elongated thin slots of windows; they found the narrow circle of stone stairs leading up. . .

He found her in the small topmost room of the tower. The bed she lay on was a spiderwebbery of rotted gossamer fabric; it was carved of ivory.

Princess Sena was no skeleton. Her beauty caught his breath. Her carmine lips were curved in a sighing smile; her raven-dark hair billowed over the white satin pillow like a wing; her eyes slept under delicate arched brows, and fragile child's hands lay gently against swelling breasts.

Kor bent over her impatiently. He touched her rose-petal cheek with his lips.

She was cold. Death-cold.

With a sob he dropped to his knees. He ached in every fiber. Dried blood darkened his brown Helden body. But it was the inner agony that defeated him. By some magic Princess Sena was forever young and beautiful — but, like all the rest, she was dead. Dead for many centuries. Atlan and the others were right.

He shut his eyes so he wouldn't see her. His dream was over.

A gibbering laugh from the open window pulled him up, then, seeing, he leaped to his feet.

There were three of them. Three Dracs. Their mottled black-crimson faces were grinning in delight. Dracs, with those powerful batwings, could reach the castle. But they were quasi-human monsters and to them the Princess meant nothing. She was dead. There was no blood left in her.

But this healthy young hero. A natural for their blood-herds.

Involuntarily, hero-taught, Kor moved back and pulled steel. The Dracs gibbered between them, talons flexing, fangs drooling ichor. One leaped for the door and cut him off. Kor's muscles responded to the fight-challenge, but his heart was empty. He faced them, seeing the thousand draining deaths in their red eyes. But somehow it didn't mat-

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ter, now. The Princess was dead. He fought, but boneweariness and despair took over. Arms pinned behind him, they lifted and swooped; Kor, strongest of the Forest heroes, was fog-borne toward the Valley of Forever Night and the captive blood-herds of the Dracs.

Sena sighed and reached languidly across her theatercouch for the off-button. At once the Dracs and the mists and the multi-dim smells and tactiles were erased from the livideo room. An opalescence faded in as walls defined themselves, sea-green and translucent, to replace what had been Vicaria.

Her father touched her arm fondly. "Happy now that your hero is dead?"

"Blissful." She yawned prettily and batted her dark eyes at their guest. "I know it's base-color nonsense," she smiled at him apologetically.

"But I love to see one of those ancient musclebound heroes get his. The Drac-chicks will drink heartily tonight." She giggled. "You're our top psychiatrist, Gold Dorff. Does that make me vicious?"

"On the contrary," he assured her, running a careful eye over her budding curves. "Women need this outlet. More than men, actually. They are normally more sadistic. It's the deathfight-sex parlay. Livideo gives us all a vent for these completely natural urges. So these mindless oafs really serve a useful purpose."

"If one should feel — umm — pity?"

Gold Dorff frowned. "That, of course, would be psychotic. These heroes and such perform their needed function for us. An outlet for our passions. Something for everybody in the Seven Kingdoms. Have you tried Circe and her palaces of unendurable pleasure?"

"Father thinks I'm too young." Sena stretched kitten-like, aware of his lips licking as she cuddled closer to the white-haired man on the other side of her couch. "We don't even have Sixth yet, much less Circe!" She pouted.

The white-haired man patted her arm. "Next year, child." He turned to the obese figure on the opposite couch. "You mustn't mind Sena, Gold Dorff. I mean, her *mention* of the sympathy syndrome. She's a perfectly healthy normal Gold," Gold Ambon said.

"I can see that."

The old man's eyebrows closed. "Gold Dorff, there is one thing," he added.

"Yes?"

"These new Lech groups? Are they all right?"

Their illustrious guest chuckled. "Perfectly, Gold Ambon. Harmless sex-plorative function. Adolescents must experiment. Part of growing up. Why? Is Sena —?"

"Just twice," the girl giggled. "I am eighteen, after all."

Gold Dorff gave her his nod and a furtive wink.

"The drugs they use?" her indulgent father wondered.

"Nothing to worry about, Gold Ambon. Teens must have their wicked-in-secret moments. Just so long

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as the Color Code is observed. That is all-important. His Goldness IX gives them his blessing."

A Black moved in silently to refill their glasses. They paid no attention except when he didn't move the ashtray in quickly enough and Gold Dorff crushed his cigarette out on his hand; he made a small sound before backing out of the room.

"Blacks don't feel pain, do they, Uncle Dorff?"

"What difference if they do?" Gold Dorff shrugged. His eyes narrowed at the 'Uncle'.

"They're like the ancient Negro slaves, aren't they?"

"Not a bit. Oh, perhaps Code Black was dimly associated with the old slaves, but that was such a long time ago. No. Code Black for menials is simply because the color black is so distinctive. They are pigment-coded at birth for low-class servants and, naturally, non-educated at the lowest Code level."

"His Goldness IX started the Code Complex, didn't he. Uncle Dorff?" Sena asked.

"Hardly. His Goldness is the current ruler of his dynasty. No, child. The Color Code has nothing to do with ethnic groups. The Race Wars were centuries before. The Code is sociological and economic, too. It refers to the stratum one is born in and must remain in until he dies."

"There have been some exceptions," Sena's father put in.

"Yes, a few. Marriage, or inheritance, under unusual circumstances, causes an upgrading. But the pigment-change is tedious and painful. It is discouraged." He hiked his bulk closer to the girl. "But surely you know all this from your livideo lessons?"

Gold Ambon patted his daughter's arm fondly. "I'm afraid Sena's not very interested in her studies. I try, but—" His gesture was indulgent.

Gold Dorff licked his eyes over Sena. "Perhaps a few lessons at my home?"

"Perhaps." Gold Ambon's voice was careful.

"Ah, well." The psychiatry Head moved his grotesque body on the silks. "Let us brush-up now. You remember the Race Wars which followed not long after the so-called Communist nonsense?"

Sena smiled fatuously.

"Spies were everywhere. Political spies. Business spies. Spy spies. You couldn't go to the bathroom without being spied on for some reason or other. It was finally decided that if everyone was color-coded and tattooed on the left shoulder there would be no need for all this. So people were pigmented at birth and the tattoos carry all other statistics; a simple flash-radio by an officer on the tattoo provides total ident with the memory banks of the Code Complex. Takes only a split second. Every person, of every color, is an open book."

Sena moved closer, sinuously.

"You're fascinating, Uncle Dorff. Tell me more."

Gold Dorff preened. "We Golds are the privileged, as you know. We control the Complex. Robot-ma-

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chines do the think-work and, in fact, we could eliminate most of the base-colors if High Goldness IX were not so magnanimous. Down scale are Greens, so-called progressives. Reds, so-called communists (they like to imagine they control their own destinies, and are permitted some license); then, Blues, educators and scientists. Varigates are artistic groups. Browns, upper-class servants. Last are Blacks, or moron-menials."

Sena ran a finger over her red pouting lips. "I sometimes think I'd like to be a Varigate. Artists can do anything they like."

Gold Dorff's smile was thin. "You are a child. Varigates' lives are as tightly circumscribed as the others. They can paint or sculpt or compose only in compatibility to their tattoo. Their deviations are overlooked so long as they stay in Code. The Code is above all." He made a perfunctory sign on his forehead, a sign required of base-colors in greeting their betters, Golds particularly.

"The Code stopped wars cold," Gold Ambon told his daughter. "Instant ident prevents unlawful acts before they start."

Sena raised her eyebrows cutely. "How can that be? What if somebody just says, to hell with it?"

Her father clucked at her; but Gold Dorff chuckled and patted her hand. "That, child, is where I come in. Such a person is obviously disturbed. His pattern has been scrambled. He is taken to a hospital and probed. If his psychosis is too severe he is shipped to one of our psych-farms."

"What happens there?" she asked.

"Never mind."

Sena sighed, then trilled a laugh. "All children are decanted in Code hospitals, aren't they?"

"So that they can be pigmented and coded, yes. Then they are trained to function within their Code. Livideo is for teaching as well as entertainment, as you know. Training varies. Only Golds are permitted free license of all the Seven Kingdoms any time they wish."

"Vicaria's another planet, isn't it?"

He wriggled hugely at the way Sena's pink tongue protruded over her semi-moronic remarks. "Yes Sena. Vicaria developed out of ancient video. The ancients used what they called plays, contrived by Varigate writers and acted out by Varigates trained to make them seem real. Of course this was never quite satisfactory. For one thing you could guess the ending.

"So—Vicaria. The Seven Kingdoms, where the adventures are random and *nobody* knows the ending. The heroes are constantly heroes, the menaces menacing. Beyond that anything might and does happen. Our emotions are titillated by seeing, tasting, hearing, smelling, being. They live. They fight. They make love. And when they do—we do."

"The tactiles are in the couches, aren't they, Uncle Dorff?"

The psychiatrist laughed. "No more. It is now done by electronic waves from the walls. Deep ident, we call it. Every cell of our bodies is involved. But the deep subtlties are reserved for Gold only."

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Sena yawned and moved silkily across; she perched close to the Head of the Code Complex, kitten-rubbing against his puffy upper arm. Gold Ambon frowned under his forced smile. Their guest was so important his shoulder tattoo was visible only under a Code A officer's torch. All the same . . .

"Uncle Dorff."

"Yes, girl?"

"Where do they come from? The Helden, I mean? And the others. They're not decanted there."

"No."

"Then?"

Gold Dorff cleared his throat and stood up, with a grunt. "I must leave you now. My thanks for a charming novel interlude."

Sena dragged herself across the silks, pouting. "Don't tell me you *make* those marvelous hunks of muscle. Can't I see, Uncle Dorff? Can't I?"

The psychiatric Head allowed a Black to adjust his gold-flecked cloak, smiling down at her young bosom. "One day, perhaps."

"Don't forget, Uncle Dorff!"

He leered when she threw him a kiss.

"I won't."

III

Night stars winked remotely down on the Gold suburb of palatial, gardened mansions, competing badly with the shimmering network of the city some miles distance. Sena, with a little giggle, let herself out of the rear garden's gate and waved down an aircab that hovered over a landplatform with its free-light active.

The Brown in the drive-bubble gave her what amounted to an insolent stare (Sena being a Gold) when the car whooshed up. Sena pulled a filmy scarf higher on her pale triangle of face and, befitting the only daughter of an important retired industrialist, ignored him as beneath notice.

He dipped among the city nightflyers. "Where to, Gold Lady?"

Sena blushed under her panchromatic pigmentation. She saw the smile tugging the corners of his mouth, when she told him the address. He knew. He worked the Gardens; he guessed about the Lech party. When the cab dropped easily on the roof platform with a hiss of reverse-cushioning, she gave him his credits and a pettish toss.

"Your tattoo is covered."

He grinned and flapped his Brown cloak away from his shoulder ident. "Kind of nippy tonight, Gold Lady. Number's T-8z4p2x in case you want to report me."

"I just might."

She flounced away to the moving downramp. He watched the swing of her dippled hips, yawned, and took out his notebook.

The party was picking up some steam when Sena had touched up the green-gold makeup she affected for the Lechs, and swept onto the mauve carpet of the main bar, for a preliminary case. The dark circle of tables was redolent of musky perfume; that odious tramp, Zinni, was already near-nude and dancing on the transparent catwalk in an imitation of the sex figures painted in

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light on the velvet walls. She tossed a look around, studiedly casual, studiedly indifferent.

"Hey now!"

"I saw her first!"

Two male Golds moved in. She brushed them aside with a not-just-now smile, and moved across and through an alcove to the back rooms and sub-parties. Her face wore a moody pout as she tried doors. The fourth door brought a delighted coo drifting down hall. She stepped in.

It was an oversize child's playhouse; the four occupants wore kiddy clothes and were playing doctor. The current doctor looked up from jabbing a nippled bottle of martinis into his female patient's mouth; he nodded and smiled when he saw it was Sena. His eyebrow tilted, he jerked a thumb toward the back. "Got to dress if you wanna play with us, eh, kids? In the closet."

Sena laughed and clapped. She ran back through the curtains into the dressing room. The long closet of adult-size kid clothes was crammed, but nothing suited her. Wrinkling her nose cutely, she stepped in.

In and through.

She tapped three times, then once, at the back wall of the closet.

There was an answer-tap from behind the wall, then the wall slid back. The tall man who greeted her with a nod was Gold, the other two were Blues. One of these was a short rather chunky woman with crisp gray-blue hair; the other a thin, youngish man with scopic glasses. His smileless stare was so earnest as to appear frightened.

They had been sitting around a small table in the center of the plain-walled windowless cubicle of a room, but the Blues stood when Sena stepped through.

"You're late," the tall Gold, Jacob, said.

Sena told them about the Brown cab driver. "I think father hired him to follow me and protect me."

"Even so he might run on to something." Jacob's frown was brief. "Sena, I want you to meet Lorry. Lorry has been in the main psychiatrists hospital for fifteen years. She is above suspicion and for that reason very valuable to us. She works directly under Gold Dorff, himself."

Sena's kittenish mask was gone, now. She took the older woman's hand warmly, gravely. "Uncle Dorff visited us this afternoon."

" 'Uncle?' " Lorry pressed her lips tight.

"Not really. He keeps coming over. He—likes me. Why else would he keep coming over? Father's rich but he is such a bore, especially about me. He has old-fashioned ideas, that way."

"Good for him," Lorry said.

"Sena's trying to wrangle an invite to look over Dorff's lab at the Complex. As a nitwit Gold she may even be able to find the key to the secret of His Goldness, himself."

The narrow-jawed Blue with the glasses put in: "I don't like her being followed here. The cabman might stumble onto something. Let's get cracking, then move again. It's time."

Jacob nodded. "Sena, meet Jon, one of our top techs. His father was Blue Jason Jones."

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Sena looked blank. Jacob quirked a smile. "I keep forgetting you've only been with us a short time and that your education has been mostly Gold frillery. Blue Jason perfected hypno-education, under protest; not to mention the livideo radar-wave ident. We have Blue Jon to thank for the deep-ident reversal techniques. Jon's ostensibly following in his father's footsteps; actually he's devoted his life to the reversal-techniques."

Sena took his blue handshake, her eyes widening in awe. "I'm your first guinea pig, Bl—ah—Jon."

"Better keep up the Color Code for the time being. I know you're a precious Gold, but we mustn't risk a slip." The flash of bitterness dropped away and chagrin took its place. "Yes, except for localized experiments you are our first. You and Kor. How's the head? You're careful to keep the incision scar hidden?"

Sena nodded. "Of course. I know I'm getting through to him better."

"Night is best, when his mind is inactive. You're part of a dream. That's the way it's had to be, up to now. Even his close comrades must not suspect. That was why we used the Princess gimmick. They all dream about. It's plausible."

"I look like her?"

Lorry touched her arm. "You were studied carefully for a year, Sena. Servants. Friends. Radar-probes. When we were sure, Jacob approached you and invited you to that Lech party three months ago. Then there was the operation to make reversal-contact and—we have a lot to thank you for, Sena."

"Nothing." She shook her dark head vigorously. "But—there are so many things I don't know yet." Her quizzical glance included all three.

Jacob looked at his chronometer. "Sit down. We've got half an hour or more before he can be wakened."

"I'm so stupid," the girl apologized. "I know I've got a mind but I'm not supposed to use it. This is like a whole new world."

Jacob said: "That's what we're after. A whole new world."

"Excuse me," said Sena, "but just what's so wrong with the one we've got. It's patterned. Neat. No wars. Is it really so bad for people to be preconditioned from birth to function in a specific manner? I mean, if he has to anyway?"

"It's wasteful," Jacob told her. "Like you. Potential talent and not permitted fulfillment of it. We are all in pretty little slots and there we stay until we die. Machines could do what the Browns and Blacks do, but His Goldness IX doesn't want it that way. It's degrading. It's unprogressive, too. We reached the end of our solar system, then stopped dead. Why? Because His Goldness didn't want progress. It was unnecessary, he said. We're self-contained here. Smug. Sure, our Code system works. It works too damn well. It stultifies. Livideo gives us romance and adventure on a platter. Keeps the base-colors (forgive me, Lorry and Jon) happy and the Madav hypno-ads keep buying exactly what they are supposed to. As you say, it's neat. Neat and efficient. But it stops human progress cold."

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"Besides the invidious things that are done in the hospitals, in the name of eugenics." Lorry's voice was harsh with emotions unleashed.

"Tell me," Sena demanded.

"All children are born in Code hospitals, as you know."

"The lividio lessons say that's to save the mother money, and so that children can be color coded by ancestry and I.Q."

"I.Q.!" Lorry was deeply bitter. "I've worked high in Code pediatrics all my life. I know what goes. Medics are machines operated by Golds. The Golds pick and choose. When an inbred Gold woman decants a submoron, a switch is affected. She leaves the hospital with a brilliant (if unfulfillable) offspring of a Brown or even a Black. Of course the population control is ironclad. If a base-color woman has an unauthorized child both parents are sterilized, and the child is shunted into the farm-labs."

Sena felt a ripple of tight cold. "What are the farmlabs? Uncle Dorff wouldn't tell me."

"Naturally Uncle Dorff wouldn't tell you. Where do you think the Helden and the other Vicarians originate?"

"They *are* human!"

Lorry's gray head nodded grimly "There is a lot of dreck given out among the Golds that livideo is populated by androids and mechs of different kinds. Not so. Human life is much cheaper and human flesh very malleable. In order for deepident to work successfully it has to be human to human. The Helden are fed and bred to be adventurous and muscular; Circe's girls are bred to be—well, you get the idea."

"How do they get there?"

"Transmitter concealed on the other side of the Cliff-Wall, where 'nobody has ever been'. Worlds' end for the Seven Kingdoms. The Care Women mother them until it is time for the hunt-fight-kill-love teachers to take over."

Jacob put in, drily: "The teachers have, themselves, been conditioned to the premise that their charges must be heroic and daring, or villainous, or sexy—for the amusement of the populace here, sitting around on their couches with their neurals titillating."

Sena thought about Kor, while indignation choked up in her throat. "What about the monsters? The Dracs? The Kelpies?"

"All manufactured at the farmlabs. They found little they could use on Vicaria and most of what they did find they destroyed, to make sure it wouldn't interfere. Vicaria is infested with automatic cameras, of course. All of the subhumans and quasi-humans, the unicorns and centaurs and the rest are whimsies created here on terra. Man-made legendry. All have roots in human genes."

Sena shivered.

There was a silence.

Sena asked, shyly: "He—he's here?"

Jacob nodded. "As you know, we picked Kor because he's a random telepath and, what's more important, he has the quick wit and inquiring mind that's been bred out of

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most Helden. The farm-lab techs miss, sometimes. It will be a terrible wallop to his ego, but I think Kor can take it."

"A great deal is up to you," Lorry said, eyeing Sena carefully.

Jon began to pace the floor. "Must be time, Jacob."

Jacob nodded toward Lorry. Lorry took Sena's arm and pulled her gently behind a screen. "Just time for you to dress."

"Dress?" Sena stared at the filmy Princess gown Lorry handed her, in dismay. "More theatrics?"

"Think of Kor," Lorry said. "Think what a jolt to him. How would you feel finding out your whole life was nothing but a farce?"

Sena sighed. "I did, three months ago."

She slipped into the filmy tulle, grimacing at Jacob over the top of the screen. "You picked me for the job because I'm a silly wide-eyed nitwit."

"No," Jacob corrected, smiling. "Because you *look* like a silly Gold nitwit." He added, "But beautiful."

Lorry made up her face, snow-white and rose petals, like a picture in an ancient book. A miniature silver-diamond crown on her dark hair topped off the illusion. Their sober stares, when she twirled for inspection, put her teeth on edge.

"Well? Am I all right?"

Lorry squeezed her shoulder. "Your Highness," she curtseyed.

Jacob went and opened the door at the other end of the room; Sena kicked back her filmy train with a bejeweled slipper and went to it, her heart pounding now that the moment was actually here. Curious she should be so emotive; she frowned.

"Alone?"

"Alone."

The door closed behind her, Sena looked down at the long muscular figure on the couch. He still wore that brief leather tunic and it was matted and stained with his own blood. His sword-sheath and shoulder strap were lying across the room on a bench. Moving closer, Sena winced at the lacerations and pale scars on his sun-browned arms and legs. His life had been one battle after another; his body was the scoreboard. The even-but-not-too-even features of his clean-shaven face were composed, his great chest moved rhythmically in exhausted sleep. His eyes were shut.

Sena sat by him and stared, thinking of Kor's life with the Forest Helden of Vicaria. Perhaps he ought to have been left there? Perhaps for him that adventurous life was happy, real; his waking the illusion. . . .

Impulsively, she bent and kissed his rough lips.

He stirred, then his forest-green eyes snapped open.

"Princess!" he cried thickly. "It *is* you!"

"Yes," Sena gulped. "It's me."

IV

The hunger in Kor was a vast thing: he must know, he must fight, he must die if need be—for his Princess. Why, then, did she answer his questions with such reluctance?

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Who were the others who came in and took her away, in the middle of his barrage of questions and his stampede of heroic love? They said he must sleep. Eat first. Sleep. He would wake up in another place, the man called Jacob said. Then he could ask more questions and receive better answers. Meanwhile the Princess had to go now. Her father (the King, naturally) would be expecting her back (to the Castle? Where, then?) and if she didn't get back the man following her might get worried and check the Lech party rooms for her. *Lech party rooms. What was this strangeness?*

He ate prodigiously. He drank. Jacob poked his arm with something that flashed and had juice in it. He yawned, and forgot his roiling questions when the desire for sleep dropped over him. But he was aware of being carried, moved, lifted. The sensation of soaring, like the Dracs, before they plummeted down on the other side of the Cliff-Wall as if they had been shot down by some strange invisible arrow . . .

Deep in his sleep came the knowing.

He woke changed. Even his clothes were different; a metallic close-fitting uniform. It was a comfort-shred to look down and see that the long white scar on his left hand from a near-death-brush, and the halfmoon of hurt where a Green One's venemous claw had raked were still there. Healed over by some of their magic, but visible.

Mostly his mind was changed, expanded. It rebelled at all this new knowledge. It resented fiercely the

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imprint of knowing all he'd thought he wanted to know, before.

"My head," he told Jacob, who was fiddling at a machine. "It hurts like hell."

Jacob snapped off the last hypno-learner switch and removed the silver-wired cap from Kor's head. "Quite a jolt at one sitting. Sorry, Kor. We're so short on time."

Kor sat up with a groan. He looked around the small white-walled room, saw the Princess sitting off away from his couch-chair, looking a little forlorn. Princess? No. Just Sena, now. Gold Sena, if you please. And she was different, too. She was dressed in a shiny uniform much like his, but hers was gold, and cut in feminine lines. After a sharp look at her, he looked away, back to Jacob. He didn't want to think about her not being the Princess, just now.

"What's all this?" he asked Jacob.

The tall Gold man finished respinning the special tapes on the machine, then poured out a glass of something.

"Drink this."

"I'm always drinking something," Kor complained. Not only was he irritable, it would help if he could smash something—preferably somebody. Geared for the physical, his fingers made fists.

"Drink up, please." Jacob's faint smile was to take the edge off not allowing himself to show sympathy. "The tranquilizing will cut down the emotion; it'll feed you, too."

He sat down and watched Kor finish off the liquid in the beaker. Sena just sat where she was.

"Let's mull over Lesson Number One," Jacob said. "See how much you retained. You need what the Madavs call saturation, anyway."

Kor put his mind in a track. "I am a Forest Helden from Vicaria," he said. "When I was a small child I was put in a machine with other children like myself. We were asleep. We woke up crying in the Sacred Cave. The Sacred Cave is forbidden to everyone except the Care Women."

"There are seven Sacred Caves," Jacob put in. "One for each of the Seven Kingdoms. Seven sets of Care Women; these women are tinged with an aura of religious awe and sanctity. Almost sacred. Go ahead, Kor."

"When the Care Women gave me to my Teacher, I was trained how to fight, to hunt, above all to die courageously. I learned well, so did my comrade Atlan. Those who did not learn well died first. There was danger everywhere in the Forests. I was leader of my tribe. I—I didn't know that all this was a game, prepared. That everything I did was scanned by hundreds of concealed livideo cameras. When I fought, when I ate and sang around the Night Fires at the gathering of the Tribes, when I kissed Liti—everything was watched. *Shared*. I was part of an entertainment for—"

"Let it out, Kor. Say whatever you want to."

But Kor choked on mere words. They weren't enough. His fists slammed down savagely; his eyes snapped shut. After awhile he felt a gentle hand on his arm.

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"Kor." Sena's eyes were wet, meeting his lidded stare of all-encompassing distrust. "That you and all of the Helden were brave and honorable is something nobody can ever take away from you. It happened. Whether your deeds were shared while you performed them, or read and sung and played-out later, comes to much the same thing. You were and you are—a hero. It's *they* who are pitiable; they can only do brave things through you. They're weak. They're worse off than you—they're trained to *not* do. They're conditioned to be spineless slugs."

Kor looked at her. Her dark hair was coiffed up, not down around her shoulders, like the Princess. Her complexion was tan-gold, not milkwhite and roses. But her lake-blue eyes were the same. Just the same. And they said things.

He took hold of her hand. "You did talk to me at night? You did ask me to come to you, and help you?" The taut agony was beginning to relent a little.

"Kor, you felt intuitively that you were special. And you *were*. Out of all the heroes you were chosen to come and help us change things. That's what the Anti-Code wants to do. Bring Vicaria and Earth back to reality and progress."

"Chosen by — you, Princess?" There was irony.

"No. I—"

"Sena had nothing to say about it, Kor," Jacob told him gently. "Actually you were picked before Sena joined Anti-Code. Picked because you are the strongest, bravest—and brainiest, too. You have a good deal of esp, including precog power. More than Sena has. But with her we were able to install a miniature transmitting device in the back of her brain. Your end of it was largely hit-and-miss. We were lucky — we hit."

"The voice of the Princess inside my head got me to try to reach the Castle."

"And by a miracle to make it. The livideo psychs don't normally interfere with anything that goes on in the Kingdoms. Vicarian subjects are preconditioned, even bred, for their particular roles. The Teachers finish the job; their functioning powers are random but they follow a forecastable pattern.

"You were the odd-ball, Kor. Your mind was tuned with Sena's. But she had to be the Princess, and your vagaries had to be laughed at by your Helden comrades. The Castle, with all its trappings, does exist, although the Princess was never alive. She's a wax image. Storywise, the Castle and the Cliff had the piquancy of being almost impossible to get to, but not quite.

"We were lucky about the Dracs. Dorff's psychs erred when they allowed them to develop such powerful wings, wings that soared up above the Great Wall. But it didn't seem to make any difference as the Dracs are low-level mentals who respond only to warm blood."

"And my blood brought them to the Castle?"

Jacob nodded. "As we hoped it would. On the other side of the wall Vicaria is uninhabited desert, the

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way the planet was before His Goldness IX got through with it; but, built into the outer Wall, is the teleporter the psychos use to bring the children and the new monsters they keep breeding in the farm-labs, passing them through the 'Sacred Caves'. Two of the Blues who operate the machines on the Vicaria terminus are Anti-Codes and we had to wait until these two were on duty to set you in motion, Kor. It was chancy, but in the few seconds the Dracs had you on the other side of the Wall these Blues, who practiced up there until they became dead shots, cut the vampires down. They had to be careful not to hit you; to slit those monstrous wings, if possible. They had a cushioning grav-net, too. You were out cold when you hit it, so we kept you that way until—"

"Until Sena was there to give me the Princess routine."

Jacob pushed out a breath. "We did want to soften the jolt, Kor. We've got lots of problems, and little time, but we couldn't risk you going ape on us. After all the trouble we went to. We have to keep changing our meeting places to dodge the periodic Code-psych probes. We brought you here to my home-lab. I'm a Gold so I have some privileges."

"Jacob affects a hobby of creative science," Sena said. "But he has to be careful about having base-color friends here too often."

Kor got up and prowled the floor, straining his mental capacities for this great gulp, as he strained his muscles. "How big is Anti-Code?"

"Not big. But once we start things rolling we believe we'll pull in a great number of restless, stifled minds, like ourselves. Even Golds, in spite of their greater freedom and being top dogs. The lowest-colors are hypno-trained to be slaves; they'll have to be completely retrained. The pseudo-politico Greens and Reds aren't too much help; they're too busy blowing off at each other."

"Exactly what are they?"

"They're a lingering vestige of the days when the world was divided into nations. Eventually there were only two major powers with their satellites; somehow or other they've kept up the pretense of great differences of political belief. They make a lot of noise, but it's all on the surface; like the rest of us, they're in a trap. His Goldness IX suffers their pompous trappings only because it keeps them busy. Like livideo, it keeps people stultified, keeps them from having ideas."

"Like children."

"Exactly. Our best bets are Blues, scientists and techs. They have minds and they most of all resent being smothered."

"We have Lorry, high up in the Complex itself," Sena told him. "And Jon—a brilliant research tech like his famous father, who perfected the deep-ident waves. His reversal technique is what made it possible for Sena to contact you—and will put the Seven Kingdoms on our side."

Kor sucked in a gulp of air. "You mean you're going to bring all of Vicaria back here? To fight it out with this His Goldness IX, and all his educated zombies?"

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Jacob smiled a thin smile. "Sometimes I'd like to do just that. Anarchy. Shambles. Clean it all up in one bloody all-out war."

Sena gave her dark head a vigorous shake. "You know you don't mean that! Most of the people of whatever color are decent human beings. They've just been led around like sheep, stifled by livideo. Take father and most of his friends. Fuddy-duddy lumps, if you will. But not wicked."

Jacob paced in silence for a moment.

"Anyway, it's not practical. We couldn't get enough of them through the teleport fast enough. But we are going to use Vicars. Use them on our way to the top man himself!"

"His Goldness IX." Sena spoke the name, a conjure-word since her babyhood, in a whisper. She fought the temptation to make the hallowed sign. "But, Jacob, nobody even sees IX. He doesn't even allow pictures. How—?"

"One thing the Code psychs never counted on. That any Vicars would ever *return* to earth. Don't you see what that means—Sena—Kor?"

"What?" they both asked.

"They're not coded. They aren't registered on the Complex banks. So they can come and go more freely, disguised, of course. We'll have to color you Gold, Kor. That is, if you're with us?" His look was penetrating.

Kor gave a tight grin. "Why not help my Princess? Go ahead, color me anything you like. After all I've learned about the Code, color me sick."

V

Atlan and Liti consoled each other for their loss, and the tribe elected Atlan as their new leader. Had the Kelpies of the underground labyrinths taken Kor, or had it been the spidery Deevs of the webbed Tower City, or the predatory Centaurs who roamed in herds on the central plateau — these and the heroic tribes of the Forests would have banded together and fought. But Atlan had caught a glimpse of the Dracs, and all knew there was no hope. Kor, true hero, was gone from them forever; but his brave deeds would be sung and resung around the Night-Fires, and his memory would prove a constant inspiration to the youth.

Night hung cool and crisp; the five leaping fires for the five Forest tribes formed an argent star; sparks danced into the flint-struck arch of deep blue velvet. Flames flickered on the heroic shadows moving and laughing and lifting great tankards of ale, sometimes bursting into song. The lissome girls giggled apart, to watch and admire.

Liti moved along the perimeter of the flambeaux, sadly, thoughtfully.

"Don't wander too far from the fires," Atlan called, from his newly appointed honor seat. She seemed to be ambling toward the tangle of junifers and dusked wall of brush.

Liti waved to indicate she had heard him but walked out of the firelight and into the shadows. Liti was slim, lithe, tawney-haired, and she carried her head erect as an

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animal. Like an animal, she was physically strong, well-adapted to an environment of outdoor living; her moccasined feet moved fawn-lightly on the moss and sward.

Alone, she looked up at the stars, like flint-sparks. To her, Kor seemed to be up there. Perhaps it was because of the religio-lullabies she remembered her Care-Women singing, when sleep wouldn't come and night brought horrid questions. The songs said they had come from up there — and after the kill-creatures had taken them, they would go back.

Kor had gone back.

Not even Atlan, although he loved her, knew the deeps of Liti's heart; that, while she mourned Kor with the rest as was befitting, alone, her heart brimmed to bursting with an unconsolable grief. Sometimes, like now, it spilled out of those dark argent eyes, but not as tears. Helden women wailed their ornamental grief at the Farewells — but never cried.

True, Kor and she were never bespoke. It could just as well have always been Atlan. Perhaps it was the wrenching agony of knowing Kor was gone from them forever. What was lost suddenly became the most desirable thing ever created. Yet, how could she forget? Every time she looked up into the stars her heart would stop beating and she would hide her secret pain by asking whatever was Out There — which star?

A twig-snap in the blackest brush tossed aside her haunt; her inborn self-protective instinct washed up in a wave of adrenalin. One of the many forest beasts, no doubt, beasts that ventured just out of arrow-range in the night to watch the Night Fire sings with hungry, hopeful eyes.

Tensing to run, Liti froze at the sound of her name.

"Liti!"

Kor's voice. *Kor's voice.*

It cut through her like a knife. Even animal-fear vanished as she waited, trembling.

"Liti," the voice said from the brambles. "Come here. This is a dead spot, we can talk here for a moment." When she couldn't move, Kor added: "Don't be afraid, Little Fish."

She gasped. In the forest there were animals called Mockers. Dangerous, deadly, because they could ape human voices perfectly. But no Mocker would know Kor's pet name for her — from ten years ago when he saved her life at the pool, when, girl-child tagalong, she'd watched him fishing and fallen in from her tree perch.

Speaking his name silently, she glided into the cave-darkness. Kor had hold of her hands, his lips brushed across her cheek. She couldn't see him in the blackness, but she knew. She sobbed his name and clung.

"You were dead! We *knew* you were dead! But how did you get away from—"

"I'll explain later. Now, you must do something for me. Listen very carefully."

Liti breathed hard to push back the shock of all this, to push back her joy, even. His voice was taut, urgent, when he told her what she

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must do. It was a terrible, unbelievable thing he asked. But she must do it. She could do anything for Kor — even this enormity.

Suddenly he was no longer there. She still felt the pressure of his fingers on her arms. She still heard the last pushed-out word: "Hurry!"

She stumbled back into the fire-circle, knowing she must look peculiar and dazed; yet even this fit in with Kor's plan. She managed to draw Atlan from his flagon of brew and his roistering friends.

"What's wrong?" he demanded, putting his ale-befuddled head close. "You're upset? Did something happen?"

Liti pulled away gently. "Atlan, I love you. But I — I always loved Kor."

He was hurt, stormy. "I know. I *know.*"

"You don't understand. I can't bear to live. I'm going to —"

He scowled, shaking his head to clear it. "To what?"

"To my death."

She slipped away before his arm could take her; Atlan watched her run toward the unwed women's section where he must not follow; he swayed there, scowling after her.

Of all places in the Forest Kingdom, the stone huts of the Care-Women, clustered against the Cliff Wall, were most forbidden. To venture beyond the logwall that separated the Teachers' quarters and yards from the childrens' playground meant death. Instant and invisible. Here was where Atlan followed Liti with roiling pulse.

They would both die. Sometimes a Helden woman, widowed and desolate, would choose to go past the stone huts and into the Sacred Cave, knowing she would never come out again. None would follow, as Atlan was now. He watched her move out of the starlight until she was one with the shadows. His whole being rebelled at this. It was sacrilege. It was certain death. Yet here he was.

"Liti!" he cried in a raw whisper. "Come back!"

Kor's voice still spoke inside Liti's mind; she heard Atlan, but she forced her feet to move further into the black. She leaned against the cave-wall, which was smooth and cool to her hands — suddenly she hated herself for doing this to Atlan. He loved her. He was good, kind, strong.

"Liti!"

"Here I am," she whispered back to him.

He moved across the tunnel, his hand touched her, then he pulled her close to him. "We've got to get out of here while there's time."

"No. We've got to go on. Kor is waiting."

"*Kor.*"

Atlan felt her slip away from him like quicksilver and move deeper into the tunnel. He followed. Ahead, it began to lighten, and he saw the faint bluish light come from cutout niches in the smooth half-moon of tunnel. There was no time for fear as he ran after the girl, the cave now widening out. Suddenly Liti stopped, froze; Atlan did, too. Ahead of them came a roaring, as

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of some monster; it grew and spun frightening echoes down the black demi-circle.

"Liti!"

She let him reach her, shivered against him.

"We've got to go back," he said. She shook her head and pulled him in toward the loudening roar.

They saw it, then. It hurtled down on them, seeming to float on a metal ribbon attached to the ceiling. Liti cried her terror when it seemed about to smash them against the floor; but it made a slight pause, then veered instead onto an offshoot of the shining ribbon.

They pressed the wall, Atlan's arm tight around her. He half-pulled his sword; he would die fighting. They heard a series of clangs and rough male voices — then, the sound of children. Children crying.

"Here! *Hurry!*" Atlan accepted the voice as Kor's because he had to. It was. His voice came from where the monster had vanished. It pulled them into scanty concealment behind a metal projection that hummed and vibrated at their backs.

There was no time to discuss Kor's resurrection; they watched while two men came out of an opening in the side of the monster that rode on the ceiling-rail, pushing a wheeled cart. It was from the cart that the crying came, from neat bins, each holding a strapped-down child.

When the cart and the uniformed figures moved swiftly past them in the direction of the Helden village, when the torches and the wailing dwindled to a whisper, Kor clasped Atlan's hand, grinning as he said:

"We've got to move fast."

"Where?" Atlan's mind was floundering. "What —?"

Kor cupped an imperative gesture and they followed him obediently and unbelievably, right up to the black monster with the single burning eye, then into it.

"It's a *thing*," Atlan observed, touching the steel hardness.

Kor smiled tightly. "Yes, a travel-thing. It will take us through the Wall, where we will find another travel-thing. Then we really do some traveling. I'll try to explain on the way. First —"

The uniformed Brown at the mono-controls gaped; the leaping unbelief in his eyes held him in suspension long enough for Kor to nip the needle gun off his belt. Moments later the mono was reversed and roaring back savagely through the bowels of Vicaria to the waiting teleporter.

VI

Sena snapped on her bedroom telvis in a welter of anxious impatience. She had waited long enough. Jacob should have called by now. Something must be wrong. As his slender taut-with-preoccupation face snapped in focus, Sena demanded: "Did Kor get back?"

"Not yet. You shouldn't have called."

"Why not? I'm alone. Father's at one of his pompous moron-meets."

Jacob shrugged. "Just as well," he said crisply. "We're just about set to cut off all communicators."

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"Won't that cause confusion?" Sena asked.

"That's the idea. Our Code world is designed for tight, constant intercommunication between the factions. Everybody's got his little job and this demands close contact between key controls. Robots, serviles, directors. It's all one great ant-hill network. Today is it." His eyes glowed with fervor, then his eyebrows lifted. "There's nothing wrong? You are set with Dorff?"

Sena bobbed her silver-dusted head. "All decked out for the occasion. He's meeting me at the Complex in an hour. I don't have much time, that's why I called. I'm worried about Kor."

"If there was anything wrong, our teleport tech would have let us know. Anyway, be careful. Good luck."

Dorff's private aircar was waiting for Sena when she stepped onto the roof-garden park space. As it flicked up she tried to coordinate what she knew about the Plan. As Jacob said, intercommunications relied strongly on built-in robo-repair. Lack of communication between sections should allow the Antis hours before repairs could be affected. Jon had used the robos own deficiences against themselves; it would take time for the components to figure out the defects were their own.

Lorry was in charge of the medic-psychs, while Jon's crew concentrated on technics. Sena's part in the Plan was to keep Dorff occupied — and through him, get entry into the mysterious part of the Complex where they would find His Goldness IX.

Thinking about him brought an involuntary shiver. Previous terran tyrants had gloried in seeing their faces and duplicates on all forms of visual media. IX was completely Unknown. A ruler without a face. That he did rule was known by everyone from the meanest Black-servile to the most effete Gold.

But who was he?

IX was a symbol. A god.

But who was he?

What did he look like?

When the aircar dipped into the shadow of the windowless monolith, Sena was acutely aware suddenly of how fantastically huge the Complex was. It had to be, housing as it did all the recording memory banks of every citizen, the birth-labs, the facilities for creating Vicarians, communications, livideo outlets, and all the other machinery that kept mankind on its enslaved treadmill. It was the very heart of the planet — the mindless, mechanical Core. And the Core of the Core was — His Goldness IX.

Sena was mildly amazed to find Dorff himself waiting beyond the door, when it dissolved, permitting her to enter. Waiting, fat and perturbed.

"The communications are balled up," he grunted, taking her arm. "Couldn't rouse anybody, so I came down myself." He cast his eyes over her shimmering sheath. "My, you do put a shine on the day."

Sena giggled. "Thanks, Uncle Dorff. I just *had* to be pretty today, after all the trouble you went to invite me."

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"Come along, child." He took her by the arm.

The elevator that sucked them upwards was a glass tube; Sena blinked at the radiating corridors like spokes flowing out from each level; flight after flight of sealed memory-banks, walls of I.D.s, with lights rippling on them, and here and there Blues or Browns tending them.

"They seem to go on forever," Sena said.

"Dull. We'll go up to the baby-wards first, then, if you like, we'll check through the current livideo crop." He put a fat finger on a button and the blurring stopped.

From behind a transparent wall Sena saw long rows of bed-machines, most of them with women on them, Blues here. The machines massaged, and changed shape with elastic efficiency; some were consummating births of squawling red-faced infants. Along the rows were uniformed nurses, mostly Brown, under Blue supervision. In another ward, as they moved forward, were rows of babies in cribs, mouthing unheard wails.

"No fathers visiting?"

"Only Golds are ever permitted. Of course Golds have private rooms." Dorff's yawns through all this encouraged Sena. They indicated he was not aware that this was not an ordinary boresome day — he soon would be. Not too soon, she hoped.

They took a tube-lift up.

"This section of lab has more piquancy." He brightened, leading her into an infinitely long room which had research tables along the center, fitted with sinks, and varied robot-machines designed for bio-chem experiments. Working Blues along the tables at both sides saluted Dorff and Sena with the Sign, then went back to their work, which took them from the table into an alcove behind each worker's designated space.

"What are they doing?" Sena asked, with an idiot smile.

"This group is making monsters for Vicaria. Each Blue is provided with basic material in the cages at the rear of his alcove; it's up to him to come up with something novel and amusing."

"I want to see!"

Sena peeked in an alcove and gave a delighted shiver. "Look, Uncle Dorff!" she cooed. "Look at all the cages! Look, there's a cute little lion in one of them. And a — a kangaroo. I've seen them in the Wild Places." Her throat tightened when she saw that several of the cage occupants were human, human children. Some not-quite. One had a furry lion-face. Another crouched on kangaroo legs, moaning against the bars piteously. Another had both; his human hands kept stroking the angry red welt along his throat and jawline.

Dorff grimaced at them critically. "Not very original. I imagine the lion is for strength, the kangaroo legs for swiftness. Of course the human brain has been altered, to emphasize hate-kill motivation."

Sena moved out quickly. They dipped in several more alcoves. There seemed to be a run on ape-

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men and centaurs. There were cat-girls and a mermaid tank, but the reptile-men and condor-things were the worst. Sena backed out of the last one with a shiver. The animal, charnel smells, the shrieks of tortured agony, the Blues and Browns moving matter-of-factly back and forth in their day's work, were too much.

"You look dizzy, child," Dorff chuckled. "Would you like to see how Circe's girls are handled?"

"No. I — may I have a drink, Uncle Dorff." Sena managed a girlish trill. "It's so — *messy*."

"Of course. We'll go up to my private rooms."

Sena's brainless chatter kept her from thinking or being sick on the way further up, through a succession of outer offices into a plush apartment of riotously hued divans. Here all evidence of workaday was suspiciously absent. There were lots of artfully placed mirrors, and a well-stocked bar.

When the door slid shut behind them Sena felt a thrill of fear ice her nerves, but she sighed and dropped cosily onto a scarlet chair. Dorff went to the bar and poured out drinks, without asking.

"Uncle Dorff."

"Yes?"

"All that dreadful blood and mess has given me a headache. Could you get me something?"

"I'll ring Task." He waddled over, drinks clinking. He patted her hand.

"Task?"

"My man. Actually he's not a man. He's an android, or as close as we've bothered to make. They're too expensive. Human slaves are much cheaper." He held up Sena's drink so that she would sip. "But Task's special."

"How special?"

"Task is part-human, part-machine. He's been geared to serve His Goldness IX and, incidentally, me. He's what they used to call a booby-trap, a walking booby-trap. He's keyed to protective devices in the walls. Task is the connecting link between me and —" He pointed up. "And where the hell is he?" he added irritably. He finished his drink.

The door slid open. But it wasn't the android; it was Lorry. Her wide unbeautiful face was carven stone, but, once, when Dorff was mixing himself another drink she flicked a fast significant gleam at Sena, a gleam that said, '*Good girl, keep it up*.'

Dorff glowered at Lorry. "What are you doing here? Nobody's allowed in here but Task."

"Task is — indisposed."

Dorff swore.

"I think it's got something to do with the communicators being off. One of his circuits is built in to your call —"

"I know all about that!" Dorff snarled. "They should have had the whole business cleared up by now. What's going on around here?" Fret-worry lines deepened as he gulped his drink.

"Not my department," Lorry reminded blandly. "I'm sure the mechs and their robos will have everything repaired soon. It's most

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inconvenient for all of us. That's why I came up to talk to you. Any special instructions, Gold Dorff?"

Dorff only scowled. "Yes. Get some headache medicine for the young lady."

Lorry shot a look at Sena, still lolling, bored. "There must be some in the office lav."

"Don't stand there. Get them!"

When Lorry came back in with a small bottle of capsules for Sena's headache, Dorff roared her out with instructions to prod the techs into getting the communicators and Task operative. Then he went to the office door and pressed a stud; a sheath of metal closed down over it. "Nobody can get through that — nobody but Task." A slow smile replaced the anger on his wide-jowled face as he moved across the room to Sena. "Now, where were we?"

Sena wondered if Jacob and the others knew about the door-shield; it was becoming more and more difficult to keep up her pose as a nymphomaniac nitwit.

"Task sounds *fascinating*," she said. "Tell me about him?"

"I told you. He's unique. He was created to be a link between His Goldness IX and myself. He's the only person, or semi-person, who has ever seen His Goldness since my predecessor. Task is engineered to protect His Goldness, if he has to destroy half of the Complex to do it. The destructors are threaded through these walls."

Over his drink he glanced at the far wall; Sena noticed for the first time an almost invisible break in the green wall. A double-door, as for an elevator.

Now, Sena decided, was the time. "What does His Goldness look like?" she bubbled. "Could I see him?"

"Shut up," he hissed, his huge shoulders quivering under the gold cloth. He went on, in a mutter to himself, "If they happen to touch off an activator in Task's head the whole Complex will blow its top."

Sena ignored the implication of their doom and the needling terror in his pinched eyes. "Can I have another drink, Uncle Dorff?"

"Help yourself." His wrath had moved down the emotional spectrum into fear, so that he forgot the pass he was about to make.

Sena stood, sinuously, and refilled both of their glasses. She doubled up on his and made her own of something pretty but non-alcoholic. Handing him his drink, she perched near him, and brushed her fingers across his thinning brow. "Don't worry, Uncle Dorff. The ugly lady said they would have everything straightened out soon."

He barked a laugh.

"His Goldness IX lives here in the Complex, doesn't he?" she went on innocently.

He nodded.

"Above us?"

"It's like a penthouse," he said. "He has it all."

Sena pointed cutely. "You take that elevator when you go up to see him, don't you?"

She felt him shudder. "It's the only way of getting into his apartment. The only way."

Sena cooed awe. "And you're in

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charge! Gosh, Uncle Dorff, don't you feel proud?"

He grunted. "Task and me."

"That ugly little Blue woman said Task was indisposed. I thought he was a machine."

"A cybernetic. All the communicators are down so they have to recircuit him somehow, to make him function."

"It won't take long," Sena trilled, sipping her drink. "Uncle Dorff, I just thought of something."

He stared at her dully, a vestige of lechery twinged his lips, then he clouded up again. Nothing had worked out according to plan. Damn the communicators! Damn the techs!"

Sena went on: "Suppose His Goldness wants something?"

"He never does."

"Never?"

"Never. He's — it's all automatic."

"For goodness sake!"

Dorff gulped down his drink and got up, brushing her aside. "Sena, child. I think you'd better go home now. I'll —"

"Uncle Dorff!"

"Now what?"

"Look, Uncle Dorff! Up over that elevator. There's a little yellow light that flashes on and off. On and off. On and off."

VII

Kor looked down at Liti and Atlan, sitting in the hypno-learners, with a brooding rush of remembrance of himself under that metal cap, with even a glimmer of regret for that far-away, lost, danger-ravished world — gone forever un-

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der the thrust of *knowing*. Anyway, they had him to cling to when they awakened. Liti looked so fragile. Odd. He'd never thought of her as delicate, with her boyish ebullience and inner strength. Still, it was Atlan who would need his steadying hand; he didn't have Liti's quick resiliance.

Kor asked Jacob, while they watched the tapes wind out, weaving knowingness into the two quiescent minds, "What happens to them now? Where do they fit in?"

Jacob flicked a sharp look. "We've got to have some primary liaison between Earth and Vicaria. They will be it. Your Helden are the best to start reinstructing. Their minds and bodies are healthiest, less messed up."

"What happens to Vicaria?"

"Most of the monsters are lab-made and can't reproduce themselves, so eventually the planet will become a tropical eden. But not *too* easy. The Vicarians will continue to be self-sustaining, agrarian and to some extent technical; we'll establish colonies there, too. With free birth permissible, mankind will have to search out into the stars for elbow room. It's a challenge. It's what we're overthrowing the Code for. Expansion. Progress. Vicaria will do her share."

"Most of the Helden will stay there?"

"Of course. It's their home. But their lives won't be a play-game any longer. Atlan and Liti will go back and carefully start making developmental changes."

"And me?"

Jacob's thin face ghosted up a smile. "That's up to you and —"

There was an interruption when a tech Anti burst in with his report. Things were moving fast, faster and more smoothly than they could have hoped. The break-down of the communicators had the Code psych-officers stymied; hundreds then thousands, of new Antis were being recruited every hour. Scientists. Techs. Reds and Greens were tossing aside their trivial differences in the light of something real happening. Even Golds. It was snowballing, now, thanks to years of assiduous planning. But the key to the whole movement was still the Code Complex — and His Goldness IX. His psychological power was a mysterious god-power; an amorphous, all-wise, father image to keep the human machinery functioning on its mindless track. He was a shepherd who kept his sheep sleek and apathetic. Yet, if he died, the Complex would crumble; without spoon-feeding the sheep might flounder and die.

"Just how do you plan to get to him?" Kor wondered.

"Sena, we hope. Dorff is the key to His Goldness."

Kor bristled. "Why aren't we on our way now?" he demanded.

"In a few minutes. Meanwhile, Lorry's keeping track."

Atlan chose to go with them, but Liti was not permitted. As the aircar veered in the direction of the great gray bulk Atlan handed Kor his sword.

"Strap it on," he advised.

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Jacob smiled at them. "The officers use hollow-needle gas guns. I doubt if you'll get in close enough to make use of those."

Kor said grimly: "Something about the heft of steel in my fist. The old-fashioned notion of getting your head lopped off might tend to discourage some of them."

His point was well taken. When the Complex door slid open and the brace of officers inside saw the broadswords, they hesitated just long enough for the trio to plunge on them. Jacob appropriated their needle guns for future use as they moved on into the heart of the labyrinth in search of Jon and Lorry.

VIII

Sena paced the garish room and waited for Dorff to come back down. The vacuum stillness put her nerves on edge, anxiety moved toward panic. Where was Lorry? Kor? What was happening out there? It was a relief to see the elevator doors whisk open and see Dorff waddle out. His face, from roiling emotions, had turned an odd purple-orange color. His jowls flapped and his voice was a low rasp when he told her: "He wants to see you. His Goldness wants *you*."

"But he doesn't know me."

"He's heard about you, through Task. The android has got a lot of subtle spying mind probers built in him. I keep forgetting."

Sena's look at the open elevator door was frantic. She whirled toward the sheathed outer door, the only exit from Dorff's private lair. Dorff caught the wild look and laughed like crumpling paper.

"Too late for that, child. Come. He doesn't like to be kept waiting."

This was not part of the plan. Lorry — Jacob — Kor — somebody should be here by now. Task had to be got to. Had to be regrouped some way, used to get to His Goldness.

It was a very ticklish proposition, tuned as he was to the destructors in the walls. Only Task could open that door. And something had gone wrong . . .

Sena's fingers shook when she fussed femininely with her flamboyant red scarf, then contrived a cretin titter as she flounced ahead of Dorff into the elevator. When it shot up it seemed as if her heart stopped working.

The doors flicked open abruptly, without sound, and Sena stared at the Holy of Holies' sanctum with wide, panicked eyes. What she saw was a small, ovalish, pleasantly pasteled chamber. An empty chamber with a floor so polished and sleek it looked as if feet never walked on it.

There were, of course, no windows, and the only noteworthy thing about the sanctum was that at its far end, belled-out convexly, was a floor to ceiling curtain, a greenish diaphanous curtain of close folds. And although there was not a breath of air stirring in the room, this curtain trembled slightly.

In the outer-space silence Sena heard the sound of her own heart. It had started beating again, like roaring thunder.

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Vague light behind the quivering drapery allowed her to see a bulky shadow moving back there, a shadow that moved along it with a strange dragging sound.

His Goldness IX spoke from behind the curtain. He said: "You can go, Dorff."

"The girl?"

"I have seen her. She will be the one."

She couldn't move, only stare, then Sena felt herself nudged out of the elevator. When she pulled her look away from the liquid echo of that voice for a back-glance, she saw that Dorff was gone and behind her was blank wall.

In the sonority of the voice, when His Goldness spoke again, was an ancient weariness, an incredible boredom.

He said: "Would you like to see me, girl?"

Sena gulped and prayed for Kor.

The voice went on: "I am strange to look at, but that is because I am not only one person, but nine. You see, I am all of the other His Goldnesses that have lived and ruled over the centuries. We are human, all right. But when we die, all of us does not die. Did you know that? The diseased parts die, but there remain many perfectly good parts that can function for a long time if they are properly fed and tended.

"The part of me that is His Goldness I decided that he wanted to keep on living. So did the others, in turn. Therefore, we should be called His Goldness I-II-III-IV-V-VI-VII-VIII-IX. Part of each, especially the mind, continues to live in this strange body. We think a lot, but we are very bored. That's the worst thing of all. In order to protect ourself from the stupids of the world (we include everyone) we must stay in inviolate seclusion, allowing others to do what must be done to keep things the way they are. It is a very delicate balance, and it must be maintained."

Sena moved her dry lips. Then, in a rush, the question came out of her. "What — do — you — want — with me?"

"You must realize that if there is to be a XX there must be a female to produce him. Do not flatter yourself that we find you attractive, that we desire your body as Dorff does. It is a matter of little importance who mothers the next XX so long as she is healthy and of good Gold stock. You will join us here for a time. Come."

Sena couldn't move. She was frozen. The only sensation she had was a sudden overwhelming desire to cease existing.

"It is an honor, girl. We need new life. The life-fluids in our pool keep our body and our mind active so long as we are near and partially in it. But we have found that eventually a burst of new life-cells is necessary. You will live here in this pool with us; you will be fed special foods; eventually the product of your fresh body will give us new sustenance. We care nothing about the piddling lives on this planet or any planet. We exist only to continue to exist. Come, girl. There is no second choice."

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Something drew her to the curtain, compelling curiosity to see Them, plus the combined power within those nine minds. As she approached it, the curtain trembled harder, then whisked to both sides.

Sena saw..

She tried not to scream.

IX

Lorry had Antis stationed at key points in the monolith to direct them to the small lab where Jon and two Blue techs were working on the android. Kor gulped at the sight of the ten-foot almost-human with his wire and tissue brains exposed.

"How long will it take?" Jacob asked, as Lorry closed the door behind them.

Jon looked up with a cranky scowl. He motioned an assistant to wipe perspiration off his forehead, pushed out a vexed sigh. "It's a fantastic operation. I'm lucky Modov here was in on his creation."

They stared down at the maze of exposed wire and tissue. "Does he come with instructions?" Kor wondered.

Jon gave him a look and a grunt. "His Goldness had Task made to his order and then all records were deliberately destroyed. His functions are to keep Dorff in line and to activate protective devices in the Complex walls if and when necessary. If I happen to touch the wrong ganglion the whole place will go up in a cloud of dust."

"Try not to," Jacob ventured to suggest.

Jon snorted and went back to work.

"Where is Sena?" Kor asked Lorry.

She told him and he said, "I'm going up there," and started out.

Lorry's face clouded. "It's no use. Nobody can get in through that special shield. Nobody but Task, that is. That's why Jon and Modov are working so hard."

"Sure there's no other way?"

"Absolutely. That room is the opening to the penthouse where His Goldness spins his webs. As for the penthouse, nobody but Dorff and Task have ever been up there."

Thinking of Sena and her peril, Kor burst out, "Why did you let her take such a chance? Don't you care what happens to her?"

Jacob rapped a hand across the wide muscle-sheathed arm. "Sure we care. Sena knows the risks. She suggested it, knowing how hard it will be to get to IX, and how necessary."

Kor clamped his jaw into rock. "I'm going up there. Atlan?"

Atlan nodded and followed him out. Jacob trailed after, pulling out a needle gun and keeping it at the ready. Near Dorff's suite of offices they surprised two prowling officers. Kor and Atlan's bladed rush got one but the other one crouched at a corner and set his hollow needles spitting. Jacob traded shots and caught him in the shoulder. The other dropped his gun and fled in primal terror from the slashing swords.

Kor shouldered through three

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outer offices, ignoring the bulb-eyed gasps of the workers at their desks. Finally he hit a door that wouldn't open. He hacked at it with his sword.

"No use," Jacob said, from behind.

Kor felt his great body stiffen in frustration, fury, and ravening anxiety for Sena.

"*Princess.*" His mind said it. She answered.

"*Kor!*"

First he didn't believe it, the haunt of sound in his brain. Then he did. She was calling him, her voice a cry of despair that pierced his mind like hot steel. She was calling for him the way she had when he was a Forest hero. Urgency, blind and fearful, laced their minds.

He froze there, floundering questions at her.

"*Princess, where are you?*"

"*Penthouse. His Goldness.*" There was loathing and terror in the vibration thrumming across his brain.

"*Who is he?*"

"*Kor, he's a monster!*"

"*What can I do?*"

"*I don't know. Nothing, I think. He is making me come down with him into the pool, with the power in his eyes.*"

"*Pool?*"

"*The fluids in the pool are what keep him alive. Good-by . . .*"

"*Hold on! I'll find a way!*"

"*There isn't any way. Good-by . . . Love . . .*"

The voiceless voice faded and Kor snapped back his head in an agony of rage and helplessness. There had to be some way to get to her. There *had* to be! He whirled on Jacob. Jacob and Atlan were gaping as if they thought he had suddenly lost his mind. Maybe . . .

"She said something," Kor muttered. His mind couldn't quite catch hold of the evasive glimmer that hinted hope. Then, all at once —

He grabbed Jacob and shook him. "Where does the fluid come from?" he demanded.

"Fluid? What fluid?"

"For the Pool! The Pool that feeds *him*!"

Jacob swore, then his quizzical gape transformed into a flash of nodding understanding. "Sena told you?"

Kor nodded, yanking him out into the corridor. Atlan swung after them in wondering bewilderment. Kor told Jacob: "She said he is a monster. She also said he was pulling her down into a Pool. I guess some kind of a tank of liquid that keeps him alive."

Jacob pulled in a sharp breath. "Something none of us suspected. IX was so secret we had no way of guessing such a thing. The fluid has to come from someplace. And since there is nothing up in the penthouse but IX, and nobody is allowed up there, it's got to feed in from somewhere below."

Kor told Atlan to fetch Lorry. "She might know something. She knows more about the Complex than anyone except Dorff."

Atlan spun away; Kor moved down the corridor to the rear of the offices, Jacob hot at his heels. They jerked open doors and banged walls, but in the end they had to

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wait for Lorry. She frowned in urgent thought.

"There's a mezzanine half a floor down," she remembered. "We've never paid much attention to it. Supposed to be for chemical storage. Great vats. Mixer. A small testing lab. A crew of six biochemists, two to a shift." Her eyes flashed, all of a sudden. "Wait. There's something odd about those six chemists. They keep to themselves. They're incredibly old, all of them, and they're all *deaf-mutes*!"

A circle of stairs spun around a steel shaft, and this led them down to the between-floors catwalk. Kor pounded ahead down the metal passage toward an innocuous-seeming door. Locked. Kor motioned to Atlan and together they flung their muscular shoulders at it. The third grunt and the lock burst. They were in.

Along one side of the deep curved room were a dozen enormous vats, color-coded, fitted with pipes and valves and tube-indicators of volume, temperature, and so on; all this led to a great bowl-shaped automatic mixer at the furthest end. At a lab table two wizened Blues were hunched over their routine precis of hand-testing and correlating. They blinked owl-eyed with astonishment at the unprecedented advent of company in their secret domain. One reached up a quivering claw to push an alarm button; Kor pulled him away and put his swordtip to the scrawny Adam's apple.

"No matter," Lorry said, aside. "The communicators are dead still."

Kor's blade-tip dimpled the blue flesh. "Which pipes feed the penthouse pool? Quick!"

The ancient only gasped.

"They don't know," Lorry said. "They have no idea what the result of their testing and mixing is, no more than most of the workers here. They have the technical know-how, that's all that's required of them."

Jacob waved them down toward the crisscross maze of pasteled pipes. "Don't waste time on them, Kor. Just start snapping off every valve in sight. The gauges will help."

Kor's vast fear for his Princess demanded action, hot and heavy; while Lorry and Jacob turned valves and checked gauges, he grabbed up the heaviest piece of metal he could find and smashed it against the mixer. First the colored plastic just bent under his onslaught. Atlan took his cue and clanged a heavy wrench on the othr side. A few more wild swings and it cracked, in abrupt, skittering ice-jags; a trickle of green-yellow liquid oozed out, first a smear against the curved side of the mixers, then, under another wild bash, the crack jumped wide and, with a protesting plop, the churning pressure from within let go. A river of pungent fluid spurted over the floor in a plunging cascade, washed across the floor and out over the catwalk.

"I'm going back up." Kor slipped and slithered along with the viscous mess outside, headed for the stairs.

At Dorff's shielded door, he set his mind groping out in search of Sena. Nothing. He groaned, lashing out at the barrier in a wild frenzy.

Sena! he called. Nothing.

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"She's dead," he gritted. His muscular bulk smashed against the door, threatening to collapse under the weight of impotent agony; a noise from behind pulled him to.

"Jon!"

It was the hollow-eyed tech and he had Task with him. Kor snapped his look at the android's impassive clean-shaven face. Ironically, it had been coded natural human flesh. "Open the door, damn you!" he yelled at the android.

With something like contempt, Task brushed him aside and moved to the door. There was no change to his smug smile-ghost expression. When Task touched a hand on the door, as if to feel a vibratory pulse in it, then reached inside his white tunic and pressed a something in his ribcage, there was a distant odd whining sound.

Task turned slowly to Kor, his look mildly derisive.

Kor gave an animal growl and heaved at the door; this time it shot open and he found himself in Dorff's lush apartment with the weird-patterned decor. Dorff was on one of the couches, sleeping off his drunk. Kor crossed over, yanked him up to a sit and slapped him until his pouched eyes came open.

"Where is she?"

Dorff's incredulous horror included them all. When he saw Task he brightened, he made a bleat for help. But the android was preoccupied; he was heading for the penthouse elevator.

Kor swept the oval sanctum in a glance; he cat-crossed the sleek floor and picked up Sena, who lay in a crumpled faint at the lip of the pool-cup.

Her eyelids pulsed open and then she saw him and clung.

He looked over her, and down. The pool was empty; that is, except for a grotesque, knobby, mottle-skinned creature flopping and floundering on the remaining drops of fluid that hadn't drained away. Kor shivered. His Goldness IX had nine more-or-less heads in varied parts of his fantastic anatomy; only one of them had a neck, the others were blobs with spread eyes and pursed mouths for slopping up liquid. The atrophied legs ended in wide flippers; pale tentacles of arms moved about. Some of those eyes saw Task.

"Help me," the squamous voice ordered. "Food. *Kill.*"

But Jon's studied hands had done their work; Task merely looked down at his Master; a faint smile tucked up the lips of his flesh-coded face.

END

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LUNAR WEAPONS TOMORROW

by

JOSEPH WESLEY

Here's our military expert's forecast of war on the moon—where the stakes are huge, the risks great, life short!

The moon is an important military base in 1985. There are colonies belonging to both the Western Alliance and the Eastern Powers dug under the dust of that Ghostly Galleon.

These colonies are not missile bases. It is not worth while to set up a missile base on the moon. The road by way of the moon is more difficult than makes sense, for a nuclear weapon to reach an enemy city — and vastly more expensive. At the cost of a little more energy than would send it direct to its target, a warhead can be put in orbit around the earth. Add to this energy by about an order of magnitude, and you have amassed enough to send with it into orbit the extra gear which breaks it out of its circle around earth and transports it to the moon, puts it in lunar orbit, soft-lands it at the desired spot, and provides suitable protection for it while it is on the lunar surface.

Another order of magnitude of energy enables us to put on the moon with our warhead the capability of returning it accurately to a predetermined target on earth. Of course, it would be more exposed to counter action on the way to the target than would a direct earth-launched shot. It would be more visible and would have farther to go. Also, the warhead would be at least as vulnerable while it was waiting on the moon as

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it would be while it was waiting on the earth—and it would be impossible to conceal the construction work of establishing the emplacement from which it would be fired and in which it would be stored.

All in all, the moon is not the place from which to plan to attack the earth with nuclear missiles.

Still, the moon is an excellent place on which to establish a military base, or bases. Weapons, devices, ideas too dangerous for earth, can be tried out on the moon without endangering Man (except those men who do the testing, and they are volunteers) and without violating treaties.

Surveillance stations — manned and unmanned snooper satellites — circle the earth in a variety of orbits. They — and the unmanned ones in particular — are subject to hijacking operations. Much can be learned from boarding an enemy satellite and examining its technological goodies. There is even the possibility of tampering subtly with a satellite's end instruments so that those instruments continue to send out reports on what they find, but the reports are false. A monitoring station on the moon provides a sufficiently continuous anti-piracy surveillance over our surveillance satellites to put an end to hijacking.

Also, lunar readout stations help to reduce the time-late for the arrival of information at a place where it can be used, after the time that a satellite has acquired that information. Information readout, beamed from a satellite to the moon, and from the moon to earth, can be almost continuous as long as the moon is up to the satellite doing the beaming. For satellites with orbits heavily inclined to the ecliptic, the moon can be up essentially all the time.

The moon is also important as a communications relay station for other than surveillance satellites. Where radio silence must be observed in order to prevent pinpointing the location of a transmitter, as in ships at sea, line-of-sight transmission to an orbiting satellite can be accomplished without effectively violating the rules of silence. The satellite is then able to retransmit to the moon at the earliest feasible moment, and the moon completes the circuit to headquarters on earth. In this task, the moon substitutes for satellites in fixed twenty-four-hour earth orbits. These could accomplish this task even more easily than can the lunar relays, were they not such simple targets, not only for destruction with anti-satellite missiles, but also for electronic jamming from squawking satellites in nearby fixed orbital stations.

So there are military installations on the moon. There are military installations of both of the major competing powers on the moon. That should — and does — lead to warfare on the moon.

A war on the moon is not as likely to escalate as is one on earth. Voting for such a conflict demonstrates that a politician — or a statesman — is not "soft on the enemy". And if prosecuted successfully, a safely unearthly conflict might even accom-

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plish some good. It would not give such an advantage to one side that the other side would feel obligated to retaliate elsewhere than on the moon. But it might be good enough to provide a measurable and cost-effective advantage over the enemy.

In this context, cost effectiveness of course considers human lives as calculable in terms of dollar value—training and transportation costs of the casualties, cost of insurance, loss of earning power through the period of normal life expectancy after return to civilian status and the like.

Warfare is therefore endemic on the moon.

Since warfare is the way of life on the moon, certain elements of it have become stylized, as were certain elements of the Korean War, trench fighting in the First World War . . . and the battles of the Diadochi — the successors to Alexander — for that matter, three hundred years before the birth of Christ.

For example, it is relatively easy, from the moon, to shoot down a ship approaching it from earth. It is much the same simple problem as that of shooting down a bomb launched from the moon toward the earth, but in reverse — and is even easier to do. The approach velocities are slower when the destination is the moon than when it is the earth, and there is no interfering atmosphere.

Nevertheless, neither side on the moon attempts to destroy vehicles arriving from the mother planet, provided only that they land without spending excessive time in parking orbit around the moon.

There is no agreement about this, of course. Any formalized agreement would have a high probability of being quickly abrogated. There have not even been informal discussions on the subject. It has been a matter of minds, not of mouths.

There are two reasons for the existence and sanctity of this wordless agreement. In the early days, when the lunar war was just beginning, reprovisioning was a difficult and a dangerous procedure, even without the intervention of the other side. There was a general feeling, while watching a resupply ship struggle down behind the lines of a half-starving detachment of the enemy, that your own side might be the next one in desperate need of food and water and air. The best insurance against this was not to try to prevent this particular bit of the enemy from getting his supply.

In other words, the environment was in general more dangerous than the human enemy. So the humans combined against nature, and only after that turned against each other.

This conflict was trench warfare, not siege warfare. On more than one occasion in the early days, one side declared a brief truce and sent needed non-military supplies through the lines to a detachment of the enemy in extremis.

The second reason is more subtle. As the environment came under control, and ceased to be considered the foremost and most implacable foe, the visceral reason for allowing the enemy's supplies to land unmolested ceased to operate. By this time, however, the mutual ability to

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shoot down the landing ships had grown to the point where each side could seal off the moon from the other. Whichever side started — both sides would find the moon no longer reachable.

Since continued use of the moon — and continued combat on the surface of the moon — is valuable to both sides, both sides refrain from starting this type of action.

Mutual deterrence works on the moon, as it does on earth. As usual, self-service has replaced any elements of humanitarianism as the reason for apparent kindness of behavior.

Although missiles are not used against ships making the long trip from earth, they are very effective against any lunar orbiting satellites. The velocity required for lunar orbit is low and these satellites of our satellite are therefore excessively vulnerable. The job is too easy. Result: there are no lunar orbiting satellites.

Similarly, the task of the lunar anti-ballistic-missile-missile is a simple one. With the gravity only one sixth that of earth, a ballistic missile directed against a lunar target would reach power cutoff point within a surprisingly few seconds after it had risen from the lunar silo, and at a surprisingly low velocity. It would arch across the lunar sky ponderously, with a slow sort of grandeur. And it would sink toward its intended target slowly and with relative gentleness. Countering it would be like shooting a sitting duck. If one of these hypothetical ballistic missiles with a nuclear bomb for a tip ever landed on a lunar installation, it would demolish it.

None ever has. The job of stopping it is too easy. Result: there are no lunar ballistic missiles.

War on the moon, then, goes on without benefit of interdiction of the long supply lines from earth. It lacks aerial (or orbital) battle field surveillance, except for very localized tactical devices, and except for the occasional overflight of a landing spaceship. It does not have the benefit of long range bombardment against the fortifications of the foe. And in general, the terrain is not good for cavalry — for fast-moving mechanized vehicles.

On the moon, the infantry reigns supreme.

Let us take a look at a more-or-less typical infantryman, while he goes through a more-or-less typical day's work on the moon. His more-or-less typical name is Tom Crandall. We pick him up at seven in the morning, in preparation for going on picket duty. He is taking a shower, his second of the day. His first shower came at five in the morning, immediately after he had climbed out of his rack, and before he had eaten breakfast and conducted routine titivation of the barracks.

Tom doesn't have a compulsion for bathing, nor is there a superfluity of water on the moon — it's just that extreme cleanliness is a necessity for a man about to put in a several hour stint wearing a spacesuit that makes it impossible to scratch.

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He is taking a Lunik shower — called a Navy shower on Earth: wet down — water off; soap down; water on — rinse off.

He is twenty-six years old, unmarried, lean and trim, with a build like a football player. In fact, in college earthside, he was runner-up for all-Conference offensive end.

Almost all enlisted men on lunar duty are college graduates. And the average enlisted man in combat duty makes more money than does a bird-colonel, down on earth. The size of the salary is necessity. The cost of the equipment is such that cost-effectiveness decrees a highly trained man of well above average intelligence to use it. Since this is largely a politician's war, as we saw earlier, the use of the draft is strongly contra-indicated. The result: the men are paid what the market requires.

Crandall towels himself carefully, finishing off with a drying blast of hot air. For underclothing he pulls over his head a soft, long sleeved skivvie shirt of sweat-absorbent material, and over his feet a pair of long sweat-absorbent socks. In between, he has to stay bare, so that he can hook into the complicated but very necessary plumbing of his suit. Although his picket duty is scheduled to last only eight hours, he remembers that his friend and fellow infantryman Dick Beardford, on the same patrol the previous month, intercepted an enemy raid — and more than four days had elapsed before things had eased off enough for him to get back to his barracks and ease out of his suit.

So, although Crandall cusses ritualistically as he hooks himself into the more intimate suit connections, he is thankful that they are there. When he is entirely dressed, with all couplings complete except for the helmet, it is clear why, in spite of the light Lunar gravity, the job calls for a husky man — the type who plays football Earthside. The suit is bulky, and in terms of mass it is heavy. Light gravity or no gravity at all, mass makes things cumbersome. The suit requires husky muscles for fast movement.

In an infantry war, the ability to move fast can spell life instead of death. And on the moon, remember, infantry war is endemic. The Men of Peace, back on earth, have seen to that. No irony is involved. War on the moon seems to contribute to peace on earth — therefore, there is war on the moon. With a distant target against which to level their diatribes, the rulers of the world need not level their diatribes against their nearer neighbors, and Peace results — except on the moon, for such as Thomas Crandall, Esquire, and his volunteering ilk.

Tom is now plugged in and ready to work. He closes and latches his helmet and climbs through an airlock into the parking area. This is a sort of pressurized garage; below ground level, of course, but connected through a double airlock to the outside by a camouflaged ramp.

Crandall climbs onto his Transporter, Personnel, Unarmored. It is a battery operated, three-wheeled runabout, with a top speed of about fifty miles an hour. It is designed to run on metalled roads, but has

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(because of the inherent stability of a three-wheeled vehicle, and because of a certain amount of apparent over-design) a limited cross-country capability.

Crandall has no intention of running it cross-country. It is a ten-minute trip to his picket post, at top speed, and a ten-minute return trip for the man he is relieving. That is its purpose: to provide such transport; and that is the only purpose that any lunar infantryman plans for it.

Still, men are now living who would now be dead if the Transporter, Personnel, Unarmored, had not been designed for greater versatility than seems actually necessary.

It is for this type of reason — this expectation of overdesign of the equipment provided for him—this inbuilt survivability factor — that Crandall and those like him have been willing to volunteer, for a not inconsiderable salary, for duty on the moon. Here, the refusal to consider computerized cost effectiveness as a limitation on design has been genuinely cost effective.

After mounting his tricycle, Crandall plugs his suit into its power supply, thereby conserving his own. He rolls into the second airlock, and at reduced air pressure goes through an elaborate suit and vehicle check-out. With everything proved to be working correctly, Crandall snaps the switch that opens the outer door and sweeps up the ramp and onto the surface of the moon. His post is a picket station overlooking the main highway connecting our own settlement with our siege works near the settlement of the enemy.

The war, as has been explained earlier, is trench war, not siege war, and the infantryman is king. Under the exigencies of this type of combat both sides have set up a similar pattern for their settlements. Originally, our camps were scattered in a random manner around the several landing sites of the resupply rockets. The positions of these camps were determined by the locations of items of geological interest, or of natural shielding for dangerous experiments, or of convenient access to good locations for communications relay or power stations.

Once the warfare was well under way, and that did not take long, the camps were relocated within a defensible perimeter surrounding a single landing station. Trenches and walls and blockhouses and other fortifications were stretched in a continuous string about one hundred and eighty miles long around these installations.

Since a line this long could not be manned with adequate numbers of soldiers all along its length to repel attack, a system of perimeter and radial highways was built, to permit rapid reinforcement of any spot on the line. Then, a dozen or so picket stations were spotted a few miles outside of the lines, to give adequate warning as to where or when such reinforcement was needed.

Meanwhile, the enemy chose a principal landing area about five

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hundred miles distant, and went through the same defensive evolution. The result was a pair of fortresses, each with a radius of about twenty-five miles, with their outermost picket stations more than four hundred miles apart. And those four hundred miles were nearly impassable to anything faster or larger than men on foot.

If this had been all, then this would have been the safest war on record.

Of course, that was not to be. Each side extended roads toward the other's encampment, and then constructed entrenchments to roll back the other's pickets. And each side attempted to harass the roadway-of-attack of the other. When the situation finally stabilized into its present status of stalemate, the result remained a symmetric pattern.

Each side has retained its original defensive perimeter essentially intact although for each side some salients have proved themselves to be indefensible and have been drawn in, while in other parts of each perimeter the lines have been extended to enclose a point of natural defense or to deny to the enemy a point of natural offense.

Encircling something more than half of the defensive perimeter of each side are siege works of the enemy. In some places these close in to a few hundred feet of the defensive installations of the opposing force; in other places they are pulled back as far as a mile. In between each arcing pair of parallel trenchworks lies a No Man's Land.

From each main camp, a well constructed and elaborately defended highway leads to the attack-line confronting the other's main camp. These roads are not protected by continuous entrenchments, but by picket stations and underground strong points from which offensive or defensive sorties can rush in time of need.

Parallel to each of these offensive access roads, and an average of about thirty miles away from it, is a somewhat less elaborate road under the control of the opposite side. These roads, of course, are to permit ready attack against reinforcements travelling along the offensive highways. Between these pairs of roads there is again a sort of No Man's Land, although not nearly as deadly as the No Man's Lands encircling the defensive perimeters.

All of the rest of the moon is Any Man's Land.

Tom Crandall is stationed in an underground bunker — actually, an elaborate and extensive installation — that forms one of the hard points defending the attack highway leading from his side's heartland to the siege-works against the enemy. He is thus more than two hundred miles outside of his own nation's main encampment. His picket station, which he is even now approaching, is designed to overlook a stretch of No Man's Land across which the enemy has occasionally leveled attacks against the highway, and also to provide warning of any attack against his own underground hard point — his own home for alternating three-month periods.

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The picket station is dug out of and built up from the volcanic rock of the hillock on which it stands. It is open to the vacuum of the moon, but covered against the direct rays of the sun. The view it commands varies from less than two miles toward the rear, where another hill rises behind it, to more than thirty miles, almost as far as the enemy covering road, which at that point curves away to remain out of sight. Of course, much of the terrain under surveillance is rough, and provides a quantity of concealment for individuals and small parties.

Therefore the picket station provides not only for lookout by eye, but by ear as well. A number of vibration pickups, scattered to cover thoroughly all of the concealed paths, relay any information they receive to the station by line-of-sight wireless. Although the vibrations won't travel through the air at all — because there isn't any — and sound waves travel only poorly through the lunar surface, they are sufficiently effective to detect the presence of any group of men or machines of significant numbers.

In maintaining surveillance over terrain where almost total lack of motion has been the rule for countless millenia, a simple doppler radar, with high-speed scanning antenna, also provides much information. Of course, it can only notice the presence of motion where it is also visible to the eye. It cannot detect concealed infiltrators. The radar system therefore backs up unaided optical coverage; its greatest value lies in its unwavering alertness.

Protecting the blockhouse, with its single man on duty, is a ring of remotely controlled gun emplacements, together with a double ring of barbed wire. Stations were originally protected by only one fence. In the light lunar gravity it is easy, of course, to leap over any such fence, but it leaves the man who does it hanging in the sky as the result of that same light gravity, a beautifully easy target to pick off. Climbing over the fence is as tedious on the moon as it would be on earth.

A clever footsoldier, however, made the single fence ineffective. Assigned as one of a squad with the unpleasant task of assaulting a blockhouse, he worked up good running speed, leaped at the fence in a fast low trajectory, grabbed the topmost strand in his gauntlets, and filpped himself over the fence to land on his feet, still running with undiminished speed. There were no survivors among the enemy at that post to admire the new technique. It was the victors who shifted to twin fences, spaced so as to foil such tactics. The other side quickly followed suit. In any case, the fences are designed to increase the time that an attacker is vulnerable to gunfire.

The guns, all controlled by an optical gunsight in the block-house, fire bullets with an extremely high muzzle velocity. With the small gravity effect, and the lack of atmospheric drag, this provides for extremely flat trajectories and an extremely simple fire-control problem, where accurate knowledge of the range is of little importance. Of

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course, these guns are of use only within the line-of-sight. As has been explained earlier, indirect fire is ineffective on the moon.

Because weapons must be line-of-sight in any case, serious consideration had been given to providing large lasers instead of guns as the blockhouse weapons. Ammunition would not have to be transported all the way from earth, and the inertia of a laser weapon can be much smaller than that of a gun, permitting it to be slewed from one target to another more easily and quickly. Cost effectiveness studies, however, had reaffirmed the advantages of guns. Bullets can penetrate a greater variety of targets than can bursts of laser energy.

Intelligence reports, Crandall knows, have indicated repeatedly that the enemy has come to the same choice as has his side. It is for this reason that the heavy suit that he is wearing has been armored as heavily as possible to provide protection from bullets, with very little consideration being given it, and very little protection being provided against, the possibility of confronting a laser weapon.

As a matter of fact, Crandall has one of the last of these suits still in active use on the moon, and he is wearing it only because his sector has, of late, been quiet. At a moderate increase in expense, an armor suit can be made to provide very effective defense against lasers, even in the area of the face plate, without sacrificing any of the vital anti-bullet defensive strength.

When the laser-weak suits began to arrive on the moon, the military leaders protested vehemently to the authorities. After their protests had been summarily rejected, on the basis of cost effectiveness, they offered their resignations en masse. As lifetime professional soldiers, of course, the senior officers on the moon do not have the same option as do the volunteers — to complete one short period of volunteer service, and then adamantly to refuse to remain for a second term. They are given only a small bonus for lunar service, enough to make their salaries a little larger than those of the troops who obey their orders, but resignation from the Service is a drastic step, spelling the end of their careers, on earth as well as on the moon. It would also seem to be an ineffective step — since the senior officers, not being required to be volunteers, can be replaced far easier than can the foot soldiers.

In fact, the High Command had considered this to be the case in a similar situation a couple of years earlier, and had accepted the resignations. It was only when all of the soldiers — the entire army deployed on the moon—announced that they would not renew their contracts, that the authorities realized the enormity of their mistake, recalled the generals and capitulated to their demands for their troops.

This type of persuasion, possible only with an essentially mercenary army, must of course be used with great caution. The cost effectiveness argument over the armor suits had been only the second such incident

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of the war, and the authorities had given in without any further argument. In any case, Crandall feels little worry about the possibility of being shot at by a laser beam. Even if the enemy had been planning to make use of them, he feels that the rapid provision of anti-laser suits has doubtless changed their minds.

Crandall dismounts from his tricycle and stumps into the blockhouse, waving at Bob Hawkes, the man he is relieving, as he reaches for the "talk wire" and plugs it into his suit. The "talk wire" enables him to talk to Hawkes in the absence of atmosphere without the necessity of touching helmets, and without the possibility of interception that would result from using radio.

"Ready to relieve you," he announces formally, and Hawkes properly answers:

"Ready to be relieved."

Without waste of words, Hawkes points to and names the important landmarks and items of possible interest, and then identifies them on the large gridded chart laid out on the table in front of them. This they do even though Crandall has stood this post several times before. General Doorman demands it — and what he demands he gets. Crandall doesn't resent this tedious attention to detail; he fully realizes the problems that could result if a lookout should misidentify a point where the enemy has started to take action. Even with such care as Crandall and Hawkes are taking, it has happened in the past, and detachments have been overwhelmed as the result, with counteraction being directed to the wrong place long enough to prevent timely correction.

With the reorientation drill complete. Hawkes turns to the equipment: the map board with lights activated by the vibration detectors; the screen of the doppler radar, and its controls; and the gun controls. While he is checking out the remote operations of the guns, Crandall hears the warning klaxon suddenly take off, in synchronism with the warning lights.

"Raid, size 12, road sector one fourteen," announces a calm voice as the klaxon ceases, and his words are simultaneously printed on the Alarm Screen. "Procedure twenty-three."

"That's me," says Crandall, shrugging his shoulders invisibly within his suit. "You get to stay here; I haven't relieved you yet. Hope you enjoy your double watch, Bob."

"Better a little extra time here than doing a belly crawl along the flanks of a raiding party. Good luck, Tom."

Crandall waves acknowledgement as he unplugs his talk wire. He takes one last searching look at the chart, his gloved finger resting on road sector 114, and then trots back to his tricycle. He spins down the road at top speed for a couple of miles, headed away from his home hardpoint in the direction of the road sector announced in the alarm, then abruptly slows and cuts off into the roughness of the countryside.

He had intended to start hiking here, but he finds that with continued exercise of his maximum skill

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to keep from turning over, he is still able to travel at a speed that, though drastically reduced, still is faster than hiking. It would have been a jolting, jouncing trip, except that one-sixth earth gravity denies the feeling of jolting and jouncing to men born and bred at the bottom of the gravity well that is earth.

After about a mile of rough country, Crandall abandons his vehicle and proceeds on foot. At first he moves in great bounds that give him almost the speed he had been making in the vehicle. Then, as he closes the danger area, he proceeds at a far slower pace, carefully taking advantage of every opportunity for concealment. His rifle is unslung and at the ready.

A vacuum suit would seem to be ill designed for stalking, and in general this is true. It is bulky and clumsy, and the heavy helmet reduces the freedom of motion of the head so that it is very hard to peer around a corner. One of the first gadgets provided as standard issue with infantryman's armor, therefore, was a periscope. Crandall has a pair of these, independently operable through external controls. When both of them are extended they give binocular vision and the impression of a pair of horns. This is why effusive columnists sometimes call Crandall and his companions the "Vikings of Space" — the fancied resemblance to a horned Norse helmet.

Crandall raises a glove and lifts just one of these periscopes into place. The eyepiece simultaneously fits snugly down over his left eye. He then cautiously lifts his body until the end of the periscope just projects above the top of the ridge behind which Crandall is crawling. This, he has calculated, could very well be where a detachment of the enemy is advancing; it provides excellent shelter from the highway, and is probably passable terrain.

Crandall is correct. Through his eyepiece he can spot a half-dozen large tracked vehicles. These are tripod in design, with a caterpillar track at the base of each wide-spread leg of the tripod. The main body of the vehicle is space-stabilized above the junction of the tripod legs, and can tolerate a tilt of more than thirty degrees. On the main body of each vehicle is mounted a rifle on a mechanism something like the disappearing guns of our coastal batteries of the early twentieth century. A line of these vehicles, if it can be positioned without exposing itself, can sweep the highway with deadly precision, and with minimum danger of counteraction. They are not yet in firing position, he notices, and estimates that it will take them about another forty-five minutes to be ready.

Crandall makes no effort to attack these tanks. It is a job for foot soldiers, true enough, but not for scouts. The men who will counterattack these tanks will have far heavier weapons than the rifle he carries. His job is to report, and he wastes no time in doing it.

He crawls carefully back until he can stand without exposing himself above the ridge. As he does so, he narrates his report into a recorder,

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carefully checking the accuracy of his coordinates. This done, he unhooks a small tube from his belt, and holds it vertically at arm's length while thumbing a lever with his free hand. The tube contains a spring catapult which shoots a bobbin a distance of several hundred feet into the sky. As it climbs, the bobbin unreels a hair-fine wire.

This wire forms an antenna. As soon as it reaches above the line-of-sight horizon of one of the overlapping radio interrogation fan beams that form part of the highway's defensive system, the radio transmitter to which it is attached is triggered by the proper code, and the recorded message is dumped at high speed into the communications net. An acknowledgement signal is received by Crandall's equipment, and he sighs with relief. His task is accomplished — all that he has to do now is get himself out.

This turns out not to be as simple as it was for him to get in. The enemy infantryman who should have been at point had been out of position, and that had allowed Crandall to do his observing undeterred. He is now back on station, however, and Crandall's first knowledge of this is the stunning blow of a bullet ricocheting off his helmet.

Crandall dives automatically for cover, his trained reflexes deciding for him the proper place to go to shield himself from an as-yet-unseen enemy. His reflexes are accurate, and he stays alive. The first shot has cracked, but has not penetrated his helmet. A second will almost certainly crack it open and let out his air. The second bullet does not arrive — at least, not yet.

Crandall contemplates his situation as calmly as he can. A mental picture of the terrain map gives him confidence that he knows where his opponent is hiding. And if he is correct, Crandall realizes that his own line of retreat is cut off. Moreover, it won't be long, he decides, before his enemy can crawl to the next rise and expose him again, if he so chooses, to rifle fire.

If he does try that, there is a small ravine that might give Crandall a chance, not to escape, but to turn the tables—but if his enemy chooses to hold fast, then moving down that ravine will serve only to expose Crandall. He thinks for a moment, and then starts crawling. That man is likely to be in a hurry; he is probably not playing a waiting game. That, at least, is the way Crandall bets the play, and the stakes are high.

As he bellies forward, he is forced to abandon his rifle. It is too clumsy to manipulate. Crandall reaches the end of his ravine, then, and pulls out his hand weapon. He takes a deep breath, and launches himself over the edge of the ridge with as powerful a push as his legs will give him, on as low a trajectory as possible.

His guess, he notes almost dispassionately, has been correct. His enemy is almost directly in front of him, and is already twisting to bring his rifle to bear. Crandall fires a pair of quick shots with his hand gun. Both of them hit the target,

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he notices, but without putting his adversary out of action. They do disturb his aim, however, and that is enough. It gives Crandall time to land and leap again to grapple with his opponent, whose rifle tumbles slowly away out of the action.

Although both of them are below the radio horizon of their own forces, each of them almost automatically grabs for the protruding antennas of his opponent's suit, and both of them in a short time are definitely unable to call for help, even if a communications relay rocket should show above the horizon.

The weakest point of Crandall's armor is the helmet latch, and he defends it desperately against the groping gauntlets of his enemy, who apparently knows this as well as does Crandall. Crandall recognizes his enemy's suit as a Nellie Four. It does not have this same point of weakness. The helmet of a Nellie Four is releasable only from the inside, without special tools. The approved tactic against this suit is repeated blows against the waste disposal trap. This is likely to fracture the seal, and allow the lethal escape of the air from inside the suit.

Unfortunately, Crandall can not seem to find the time to deliver these repeated blows, and the grunting panting struggle goes on for several minutes. So closely are the two locked together that each can clearly hear the gasps of the other. Crandall hates to risk a disengagement. His own hand gun lacks the power to penetrate his enemy's armor, but a handful of shots from the enemy's pistol against his own already weakened helmet might very probably serve to end the battle.

Crandall, however, has a secret weapon. It is new, and untried in action. He hates to risk his life on the success of such a device, but he finally decides that it is his best hope. Since his enemy has been perfectly willing to back off, and it is Crandall who has been hanging on grimly, it is not at all hard for him to get far enough away to draw his secret weapon. He just lets go.

Then, at point-blank range, each shoots at the other.

Crandall's helmet cracks again ominously as the first two bullets hit it, but it holds together. The succeeding shots go wide of the mark. Crandall's weapon is simply a paint-spray gun, and with it he blacks out his foe's face plate. Then, as the enemy's periscopes swing out, he succeeds in blinding those too.

Now, as Crandall steps forward to finish off his helpless opponent, his blinded adversary leaps wildly into the air as high as he can go. Crandall at once changes his mind, and retreats at the maximum speed he dares use. If his enemy has managed to jump high enough to be visible to his friends, he may soon be getting reinforcements.

Crandall is very thankful when he finds himself back at his Transporter Personnel, Unarmored, and equally thankful that he had chosen to take it with him cross country. He has evidence that he is being chased. As soon as he can, on his very hurried

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trip back to the highway, he checks in, using his vehicle's communications equipment. He is told that his personal engagement is the tail end of the battle. The enemy, on discovering that the details of its deployment had been prematurely discovered—by Crandall — had commenced a quick retreat.

Once on the highway Crandall is out of danger, and some time later is back at the lookout station.

"I'll take the rest of this watch," offers Hawkes, eyeing him. "You look a little beat up."

"No, thanks," answers Crandall. "It's my watch. I'll finish it."

"You're a bear for punishment," shrugs Hawkes. "But you're right — this is supposed to be your watch, so you're the boss. I just never had you figured for the hero type."

Crandall, having relieved the watch, is chuckling to himself as he watches Hawkes leave. His suit has been bunged up, but it will hold together, no sweat. The Transporter, Personnel, Unarmored, on the other hand, is in bad shape. Crandall figures that he may have overdriven it just a little, going cross country, in getting away from the scene of the battle. With two square wheels, he figures that Hawkes is likely to have a slow trip home.

In fact, Crandall tells himself, when Hero Crandall is relieved of his watch in less than two hours by a man with a nice fresh tricycle, he is likely to make it back to a warm shower and a hot dinner well ahead of Square Wheels Hawke. END

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Coming.... Tomorrow!

We all know that science-fiction readers are among the most alert and intelligent groups in the world population, right? And we know that one of the major concerns of any specialized discipline is that it needs the impact of fresh, alert, intelligent viewpoints from outside to keep it flexible and stimulated . . . Well, next issue of *Worlds of Tomorrow* gives us all a chance to apply our layman's mind to thinking up possible explanations for some of the puzzles facing modern astronomy. We have an article by Robert S. Richardson. It's called *Theories Wanted* — and the person Richardson wants them from is you!

Of course we'll have the usual lineup of alert, intelligent, bright, fresh and stimulated stories and features — Mack Reynolds, Gordon R. Dickson and a bunch of your other favorites included — so even if you don't have a theory, we expect you'll have a good time reading the September *Worlds of Tomorrow!*

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A GLASS OF MARS

by ROBERT F. YOUNG

Illustrated by MORROW

He longed for a world that was thousands of years dead—and sacrificed to it all of today's!

I

Alonzo Shepard, Supervisor of Geologic Records, made a final entry on the Deucalionis Regio data sheet, replaced the sheet in the D.R. folder, and shoved the folder across the records desk to his secretary. "File this, Miss Fromm, and we'll call it a day — it's almost midnight."

Miss Fromm was a Martian — that is to say, she was a member of the first generation to have been born on Mars, and thought of herself as a native. Shepard, whose residence on the planet fell considerably short of a terrestrial year, thought of himself as a trespasser.

Despite her so-called Martian lineage, he also thought of Miss Fromm as one. Watching her as she walked across the records room and slipped the folder into the file-o-matic cabinet, he compared her with the exquisite women who had lived on Mars millennia ago during the heyday of its glorious civilization and who were immortalized in the renovated paintings that hung in the Martian section of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Tall, stacked—in her own words, "a veritable sex-machine" — she suffered horribly from the ordeal, and he enjoyed every minute of her pain. The Martian vineyards he had come to Mars to help cultivate were never going

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to bear fruit, and Miss Fromm was one of the little foxes who had spoiled the vines.

Her chore completed, she returned to the desk and regarded him across its expanse of electronic recording equipment. She exhibited none of the tiredness that should have been hers after the long stint of overtime she had put in. As always, her dark and lustrous swept-back hair was neatly in place; as always her gray eyes were agleam with energy and excitement. As always, her cheeks displayed the roseate glow of a female who is as healthy as a horse.

"Shall I get your coat for you, Mr. Shepard? You look bushed."

Annoyed, he got it himself. He hated to be fussed over, especially by Miss Fromm. After turning out the records-room lights, he accompanied her to the lift, and they dropped swiftly to the ground floor of the Edom I Geology Building. Presently they stepped into the deserted street.

Shepard hesitated. This was the first time Miss Fromm had ever worked overtime with him. For that matter, it was the first time they had ever left the building together. Should he offer to escort her home or not? Crime wasn't exactly rampant in Edom I, but the hour was late and there were bound to be drunks abroad.

He attacked the problem obliquely, hoping to outflank it. "Will it be safe for you to go home alone, Miss Fromm?"

She laughed, displaying a slight hiatus between her front teeth. "My apartment is only two blocks away — I'm not like you, Mr. Shepard, who puts living in the country above convenience and common sense."

No, she wasn't like him — and he wasn't like her, either, and he was damned glad of it. Nevertheless, her remark irked him. "Convenience and common sense aren't everything, Miss Fromm."

She ignored the observation. "Why don't you walk home with me anyway? That way, you'll be sure I get there safe, and we can have beer in my apartment and watch TV."

It was what he had been afraid of. "If I did that, I might miss the last tube car."

"Tube car-smube car — why should you want to go home when you can sleep with a veritable sex-machine like me?"

He was accustomed to Miss Fromm's forthrightness, having had her as his secretary ever since she had come to work for the Bureau of Geologic Research three Martian months ago; but this time it seemed to him that she was going too far. "That's no way for a respectable girl to talk, Miss Fromm."

"It is when she's a Martian and the man she's talking to is going to marry her."

"I've told you before that I'm never going to marry anyone!"

"When you realize what a bargain you're getting in me, though, you'll change your mind. I'm thirty-eight, twenty-seven, thirty-nine, I'm five feet, eight inches tall, and I weigh one hundred and twenty-eight pounds. Stripped."

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He sighed. She had told him her measurements before. It was customary on Mars for girls to do such things, and after his initial shock he had managed to take the custom in his stride. Nevertheless, he was still diametrically opposed to it.

"Don't you see, Miss Fromm, that when you break your body down into Arabic numerals, you're demeaning it? Don't you see that when you approach sex by the numbers, you're robbing it of its last vestige of romance?"

Again she laughed, showing the slight gap between her front teeth. It was almost as though she were proud of the imperfection. "What do *you* know about romance, Mr. Shepard?"

"I know that it's dead on Mars, and has been for millennia! I know that supervisors who concern themselves about their secretaries' safety have rocks in their heads the size of the Martian moons. Good night, Miss Fromm!"

He turned and walked away. For a while there was no sound behind him; then he heard the *clack-clack* of her high heels as she set forth in the direction of her apartment. Presently the sound faded away.

The nerve of her, he thought, implying that *he* didn't know anything about romance! Still upset by her remark, he continued on in the direction of the Edom I Tube Terminal. He was going to have to do something about Miss Fromm.

He halted when he came opposite one of the fenced-off stands of Martian ruins around which Edom I had been built. Maybe a brief exposure to beauty would soothe his ruffled feelings. Beyond the plasti-picket fence delicate fluted columns stood palely in the starlight. A poignant tower fragment seemed to be reaching for the bright blob of the farther moon which hovered high above the transparent pressurized dome that enclosed the city and held the cold at bay. The flagstones of a millennia-old courtyard lay like silver fronds upon the hallowed ground.

Invariably, when he looked at the ruins of Martian buildings, Shepard saw the Martians who had lived in them. Presently he saw the Martians who had lived in these. Tall, graceful, their noble faces reflecting their noble thoughts, they strolled sedately in the light of the stars and the moon, blissfully unaware of the ugly terrestrial structures that had sprung up like weeds in the garden of their glorious city. Some of them carried metallic books, and read as they strolled. Others had formed into groups, and were conversing in low melodic voices. Some stood apart, looking at the heavens in silent meditation. None would ever know in his pursuit of lofty ideas of the ugly domed metropolises that had mushroomed up from the sites of the original archaeological bases; of the hordes of men and women who had come from Earth to collect artifacts and compile data and live off the bones of a civilization whose feet they were unfit to kiss; who got drunk in cheap cafes in the shadows of ancient halls of learning and who broke through fences and made love

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in the once-sacrosanct aisles of ancient temples; who in a thousand other ways defiled, sullied, contaminated, and desecrated the sad and shining memories of Mars.

II

There was a cafe just down the street. Leaving the ruins behind him, Shepard walked past it rapidly, trying to ignore the bawdy laughter that came from within; the clink of glasses and the inane chittering of cheap machines; the whine and whir of handbandits on the walls.

He had had great dreams for Mars, Shepard had.

In his mind he had seen the peoples of Earth building a shining new civilization on the ruins of the old and using the long-extinct race as an exemplar and lifting themselves up to a higher plateau. He should have known better. He should have known that inferior peoples do not try to lift themselves up to the level of superior ones — they try to pull the superior ones down to their own. And he should have known that wherever there are vineyards there are little foxes too. But he hadn't known these things, and he had come to Mars with stars in his eyes, and now the stars had turned to cinders and his bitterness knew no bounds.

The Tube Terminal was just up ahead. He walked toward it with long strides. Like most of the other buildings that constituted Edom I, it was a monstrous glass slab of an edifice rising half a dozen stories above the street. Unlike the other buildings, however, it also extended half a dozen stories below the street. These latter stories were the levels from which the subterranean pneumo-tubes extended to the four other domed cities on Mars, and to the domed commuti-towns that had sprung up in between them. The cities approximated Edom I's 15,000 population, and the nearest—Edom II—stood less than seventy-five miles to the west. The others—were located far to the south, west, and north respectively, and, like Edoms I and II, bore the place-names of the regions in which they stood. Shepard lived midway between Edom I and Edom II in Sands, one of the domed commuti-towns that served both communities.

He could have obtained comfortable rooms within walking distance of his job, but he had chosen not to do so. There wasn't much to see on the oxygen-starved surface of Mars, but what little there was to see could be seen far better from a small town than it could from a small city.

The Terminal was almost deserted. Most of the people who worked for the euphemistically labeled companies that were systematically sifting the red sands of Mars for artifacts and precious stones and anything else that could be turned into a big buck, were home by this time watching canned terrestrial garbage on their TV screens; and most of those who weren't were touring the cafes and the other entertainment oases.

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After picking up an evening paper at the concourse newsstand, Shepard descended the stairs to level 6. He was chagrined to find that the last Edom I-Edom II express had already departed and that he'd have to take the local. A glance at the electronic schedule board informed him that the local in question was a double one, that the first section — no. 29-A — left from Berth 8 at 12:20 A.M., and that the second section — no. 29-B — left from Berth 8 one hour later. A glance at the level-clock informed him that he had less than sixty seconds to get on board.

He dogtrotted down the line of berths, fed the turnstile in front of no. 8, shoved through it, and ran for the doorway of penumo-car no. 29-A. "Red Rock, Sunset, Sands, Acreage, Moraine, Arroyo, and Edom II," the electronic A.P. intoned as he dashed through the opening. The air valves hissed then, and the door closed and the car began to move.

He had known he was the last passenger to get on at the Terminal. Now, glancing down the aisle, he saw that he had also been the first: the two long seats that ran the length of the air-tight, windowless vehicle were empty. He sat down on the one on the right and unfolded his paper. The car accelerated rapidly, leveled off well below maximum safety speed. There was no sound save for a faint hiss now and then of escaping air.

Idly, he glanced at the front page. It contained the usual abracadabra. The Department of Automotive Engineers was on the verge of perfecting a hydro-carbon filter that would enable Martians to drive automobiles without asphyxiating themselves and their fellows. The Bureau of Hydroponics was putting a new line of synthi-meats on the market. The Cost of Martian Living was up 1.2 percent. The New United Nations had adopted a resolution to set Earth's moon aside as a burial ground for Great Earthmen. Shepard yawned, and laid the paper on the seat.

"Red Rock," intoned the A.P. "All out for Red Rock."

The car slowed, and came to a smooth stop. The door opened; valves hissed. Then the door closed, and the car moved on, Shepard still its sole passenger.

He yawned again. When the car began to slow down mere seconds after it attained its former velocity, he thought at first that he'd dozed. There was a slight lurch. Then, "Kandzkaza," the A.P. shrilled. "Kandzkaza."

Shepard sat up straight on the seat. The Terminal schedule listed no such place-name as "Kandzkaza". Moreover, Sunset was supposed to have been the next stop. Then Sands, Acreage, Moraine, and Arroyo.

The door opened, the valves hissed, and a girl got on.

Simultaneously, a strange yet tantalizingly familiar fragrance filled the car. If Shepard hadn't known better, he would have sworn that it was fresh air.

The girl was quite tall — though

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not by Miss Fromm's Junoesque standards — and lithe and graceful of figure. Her hyacinth hair was parted in the middle and fell to her shoulders, throwing off evanescent glints of blue. Her face was oval, and delicate of nose, mouth, and chin — in a word, exquisite. Her skin had a faint reddish cast.

Her apparel intrigued Shepard almost as much as she herself did. The main item was a filmy blue skirt that fell — or rather floated — halfway to her knees. It was patterned with tiny stones that coruscated as she walked and lent the effect of a small but dazzling snowfall. A garment of similar material and decor covered her breasts, outlining but not emphasizing their fullness, and attached to it just below her left shoulder was an iridescent brooch. Her shoes — or rather, sandals — were golden, and were held firmly on her feet by filamentous golden laces that climbed all the way to the gentle curve of her calves. Hanging on a leathern strap from her left shoulder was a small leathern bag that could have been a briefcase or a purse — or both.

III

The single startled glance she accorded him as she sat down on the opposite seat suggested strongly that he failed as utterly to fit into her scheme of things as she did into his. Then the door closed, and the car started up again, and the strange fragrance that had entered with her was swiftly dissipated by a flow of sterile air from the ceiling vents. "Artificial air", Shepard called it. Wherever you went on Mars it was what you breathed and all you breathed, and it was as alien to real air as man could make it.

He had taken his eyes from the girl out of common courtesy, and now he began to wonder whether he had really seen her — whether she had actually boarded the car at Kandzkaza or whether she was a wish-fulfillment figment he had created out of the mists of his unconscious. But when he looked across the aisle again, she was still there, and at length he concluded that she had come from a masquerade party of some kind.

But *what* kind? And what had she gone as? — a princess of ancient Mars? And why in the world hadn't she brought a coat along to keep her warm on the way home and to cover her near nakedness?

The car was slowing again. "Wistaria," shrilled the A.P. "Wistaria."

Wistaria?

There was no Wistaria on the Edom I-Edom II run, any more than there was a Kandzkaza. Moreover, there was something wrong with the A.P.'s "voice". The compact electronic mechanism was supposed to recite the station stops — not call them out like a fishwife summoning her husband to supper.

The door opened; valves hissed; the girl got up to go. Again, fragrance filled the car. There was a hint of sweetness in it — a nostalgic sweetness . . . Suddenly he knew what it was. It was the sweetness of vineyards in autumn — the sweetness of grapes ripening on the vine.

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Did the inhabitants of Wistaria grow grapevines beneath their stereotyped dome?

They certainly grew beautiful girls.

He experienced a poignant sense of loss as she passed through the doorway and out of his sight. He felt as though he had been proffered a magic cup, and that if he had had the presence of mind to raise it to his lips he would have found it brimming with the simple delights he had always dreamed of but had never been able to find. Then he saw the iridescence on the seat where she had sat, and knew that it wasn't too late to raise the cup to his lips after all, nor to quaff its magic contents.

He stepped across the aisle and picked the iridescence up. It was the brooch that she had worn above her heart. Reds, yellows, greens, and icy blues leaped up into his eyes and dazzled him, and in the rainbow mist he saw her hyacinth hair, her classic face . . . and he ran through the doorway into the station, calling "Wait!"

She was nowhere to be seen.

He paused. Behind him, valves hissed. The door closed, and the car moved on.

He felt like a fool. Now he'd have to wait God alone knew how long for the next car, and might not get home until morning.

The fragrance was all around him now, and it was like the land-smell sailors used to talk about when they raised a tropical island after long weeks at sea — a smell you never knew existed till you came back and found that it was there; a smell you swore you would never let slip through your fingers again . . . and then forgot about because its omnipresence cancelled out your newfound sensitivity.

But *I* haven't been to sea, Shepard thought. And even if I had been, this station is a far cry from an island. It's a cellar beneath a commuti-town — a cellar where people who have never been to sea get on pneumocars and get off them, and never raise an island in their lives.

He became aware of how cold the air was. Cold and clean and fresh. He raised his eyes, unwittingly bringing the station sign into his line of vision. It was trapezoid in shape, and it said,)-(/-(—/)-).

)-(/-(—/)-)?

Shepard swallowed. It was a weird way to spell Wistaria, if you asked him.

Now that he noticed it, the rest of the station didn't quite add up either. It looked like an ordinary station, but everywhere there were nuances of difference. For instance, the turnstile was an ornately carved gate in an ornately carved wall, and the floor, instead of being concrete, was crystal. And there were no stairs. Where they should have been, a railed ramp spiraled upward through a well-like opening in the ceiling.

Grimly, Shepard passed through the gate and approached the ramp. He began ascending it to the next level, alert for any sign of life.

There was none.

The next level turned out to be

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the surface, and he emerged in starlight. A wind blew against his face — a cold wind. He shivered. Not because the wind was cold but because Wistaria had no dome.

By rights, he should have been dead for five minutes already — his lungs ruptured, blood freezing on his lips, his body turning blue. But he wasn't dead. He had never felt more alive in his life.

In the distance to his left where the dome of Edom I should have been, a strange city stood. He saw towers — hundreds of them, thousands. Pale in the starlight they stood. Argent in the light of the farther moon. Stately towers, rising out of a mass of buildings that were undoubtedly no less architecturally inspiring than they, but which both distance and darkness obscured. And surrounding this exotic city that had no right to be were still other buildings — smaller, for the most part, than those of the city proper, and blending together to give the illusion of a wide, circular patio.

Facing in the opposite direction, he saw another, more distant city — this one standing where Edom II should have been. It was a twin — or, if not a twin, a cousin — of the first.

He was standing on the outskirts of a little village. Wistaria — yes, it had to be Wistaria. There were about a dozen structures altogether, all, save a few, in darkness. Six on one side of the street, six on the other.

The street was a road, really — a road that emerged from vineyards, ran through the town, and then entered other vineyards. The vineyards were everywhere as far as his eyes could see. Row after row after row of them spread out beneath the starbedight sky. The perfume of their ripe and ripening fruit was almost overwhelming. In the distance, the wide ribbon of a river gleamed. No, not a river — a canal.

Shepard swayed in the starlight. It was all an illusion or a dream. It had to be. Nothing had grown on Mars for millennia. The only water was at the poles or in the pipelines that conveyed it to the domed cities and the domed commuti-towns. And the only cities were Edom I, Edom II, Cydonia, Aeolis, and Pandora. There were no villages at all.

Phobos was rising in the west and commencing its race across the sky. Now the buildings of the little village that had no right to be had two shadows.

He had two shadows also.

A girl was walking down the village street carrying a pocket torch and shining its light on the ground. *The* girl. Looking for her brooch, no doubt, not knowing she had lost it in the car. He held it before his eyes and stared at it in the shifting moonlight.

He ran his finger over the strange unearthly stones. They were real all right. And so was the night and the stars, the distant cities and the vast vineyards, and the girl walking down the village street. He moved toward her in the starlight, his shadows drifting on the ground. She gave a slight start when she heard his tread, and shone the light into his face.

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IV

He handed her the brooch. "You left this on the seat."

She took it from him and lowered the light. She said something in a language he couldn't remotely understand. He shook his head. "I speak English, Spanish, and French." Then he said something in each — to no avail.

There was puzzlement on her starlit face. She spoke again in the same language, and again he shook his head. At length she resorted to signs. Pointing to the well that gave access to the subterranean tube station, she shook *her* head and held the palms of her hands a considerable distance apart, and he understood that she was telling him there would be no more cars coming in for a while. Next, she touched his arm and pointed up the street in the direction she had come, and he understood that she wished him to accompany her.

Why not? He walked beside her up the little thoroughfare, wondering how she could endure the chill night air with practically nothing in the way of clothing to combat it. In a way, the climate reminded him of Japan in autumn. It was cold there too after the sun went down, and damp — very damp. But that was because of the nearness of the sea and the mountains, and there were no mountains here, nor was there a sea either — at least he did not think there was. There was a canal, though—and hills. He could see them beyond the town — low, with little trees growing on them. The wind blew against the trees, and they swayed in the cool starlight, in the shifting patterns of the moons... And there were the stately cities and the verdant vineyards and the sweet scent of ripe and ripening grapes, and the girl walking beside him in the enchanting Martian night.

The houses reminded him of Japan too. They were one-storied and covered large areas of ground, and he suspected there were courtyards in their centers, with flowers growing along pebbled paths, and faerie-fountains twinkling in the starlight. They came to her house presently, and she put her finger to her lips in an unmistakable gesture for him to be quiet, and he assumed that her parents had retired for the night.

Then she unlocked a sliding door and they stepped into a large room that could have been a kitchen or a living room and that was probably both. Light emanated from blue globes suspended at regular intervals from the ceiling. The floor consisted of orange-colored bricks, and similar bricks formed a waist-high wainscoting along the walls. Three windows, all of them open, looked out into the street, and there was a fourth window in the upper section of the sliding door. This one was closed. The walls proper consisted of dark-colored wood that had been left unpainted and was the better for it. In the center of the rear wall, a second door gave access to the back section of the house. In the center of the floor there was a rectangular stone table on either side of which a stone bench stood.

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The girl pointed to one of them, and Shepard sat down on it, and she brought him wine.

What wine was this? Certainly it was like none he had ever tasted before. It was cool fire in his throat and afterward pleasant embers in his stomach. He knew a new keenness of perceptions, an unprecedented clarity of thought. His hostess had sat down opposite him, and now, by means of gestures, she asked him to take off his coat. He refused as politely as signs would permit: not only were the windows open, there was no heat in the house, and he was cold. He had already removed his hat. She picked it up and examined it curiously. Then she smiled and pointed to the top of her head and said something that he was sure meant, "We Martians wouldn't dream of wearing such a ridiculous ornament!" He pointed to himself then and said, "Alonzo Shepard," and she pointed to herself and said, "Thandora."

Thandora . . . The name fitted the magic of the moment. The mere sound of it brought to mind those little moons up there in the sky, those exquisite towers standing in the purple distances, that shining canal flowing through the verdant vineyards, that haunting fragrance of ripe and ripening grapes. The past . . .

For it was the past. It had to be. This was the Mars of yesterday — the Mars his greedy contemporaries were digging up and exploiting for all it was worth. The Mars that should have inspired Earthmen to turn over a new leaf and to begin seeking loftier fields of endeavor. The Mars that was responsible for the ruins he had looked upon, in one sense, a scant half hour ago. And somehow he had thwarted the barrier of time and traveled back through the ages to its nonpareil shore.

He remembered the slight lurch the pneumo-car had given just before it reached Kandzkaza; the change in the A.P.'s "voice". Perhaps in this age interurban travel had been accomplished by means of subterranean tubes also, and owing to a coincidence of the Kandzkaza-Wistaria tube-length of the past with the Sunset-Sands length of the present and a concomitant coincidence of schedules, a time warp had come into being and pneumo-car no. 29-A for the time being, now traveled in the past during part of the 12:20 Edom I-Edom II run and provided transportation for the inhabitants of two different ages. Or possibly there was a corresponding pneumo-car in the past, and the two cars became one for the duration of the coincidence. That would explain the variation in the A.P.'s "voice".

It was only a theory, and a tentative one at best; but Shepard had a hunch that it was as close to the truth as he would ever get. He would be able to strengthen it somewhat if he could leave by the same door as in he came, and if he could return, he would strength it still more. But it would still be a theory, and nothing more.

Thandora had filled his glass again. It was more like a flower than a glass—a crystal flower open-

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ing its petals to the cool elixir of the wine, dispensing it at his whim, and proffering more. I won't quibble about *how* I found this place, he thought. It's enough that I *have* found it — that I'm able to drink a glass of the glory that was Mars . . . The fragrance of the vineyards wafted through the open windows. He could hear the wind sobbing in the little trees that adorned the hills. He could hear it whispering in the foliage of the vines . . . No, I won't quibble. And if I can't get back to when I came from, I won't cry.

But he had to try. He had to know one way or the other whether the feat could be accomplished. Perhaps the coincidence of schedules wasn't confined to no. 29-A alone — perhaps there was a car in the past whose schedule corresponded to no. 29-B's. If there was, he could find out the answer — or part of it, at least — right away. No. 29-B left the Edom I Tube Terminal at 1:20, and according to his wristwatch — a gaudy, diamond-studded affair that Miss Fromm had given him for his birthday — it was almost that time now.

It took some doing, but at length he managed to convey the information to Thandora that he wanted to know when the next westbound pneumo-car would be in. She did not answer for a while, and he could tell from the expression on her face that she didn't want him to leave; then, reluctantly, she pointed toward the station and held the palms of her hands a short distance apart. The message was as clear as though it had been spoken: *Soon.*

He finished his wine and got to his feet. She stood up too, and came around the table. Putting her left hand over her own heart and her right hand over his, she looked questioningly into his eyes. At length he understood that she wanted to know whether he would return, and he nodded emphatically, hoping that the gesture meant the same thing in her world as it did in his. Obviously it did, for she smiled and dropped her hands. Then she touched his watch, which she had apparently identified as a timepiece, and again looked questioningly into his eyes, and asked. *When?*

He would return the very next night at the very same time, he "told" her.

And he would, too — if the Good Fates pleased.

She bade him good night at the door, and he walked down the street toward the station. Phobos was already high in the sky, and the stars glistened like new-formed dewdrops. One of them was Earth. He found it presently. Blue and brilliant, it hung low over the horizon, by far the most beautiful body in the heavens. The realization that he was seeing it as it had been during the Upper Paleolithic Period stunned him. It was the day of the Cro-Magnon man — the time of the wild-horse massacres; of the flint-tipped spear and the stone knife. The stone-age forerunner of the electric can-opener — the burin — had been in use for some time and was considered by many to be the ultimate implement. The best of all possible worlds was, as it would always be, just around the corner.

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V

His footsteps gave forth a hollow sound as he descended the ramp. Belatedly he wondered how he was going to get past the gate, but it opened to his touch. Apparently in this day and age true turnstiles were unknown. Presently a pneumo-car came abreast of the platform. He looked at it intently, but for the life of him he couldn't see anything in the least alien about it — or at least about that part of it that was visible to him. Finally, when no one got off, he climbed aboard. The valves hissed then, and the door closed. The car moved out of the station and began to gather speed.

He saw now why no one had got off. There had been no one to get off. He took advantage of his opportunity and examined the car's interior, but once again he saw no signs of alienness. Like all cars he had ever ridden on, it was utterly devoid of individuality, and perhaps therein lay the reason that two cars could become one without the passengers being aware of the fact.

Yes, but suppose there were passengers on *both* cars before the event took place. They would become aware of each other, wouldn't they?

Maybe, though, the paradoxical quality inherent in the coincidence ruled out such an eventuality. His presence on the first car when Thandora had got on could very well have been an accident — an oversight on the part of Time. Certainly the absence of any other passengers would seem to indicate that such was the case.

But he was still theorizing. For all he really knew, car no. 29-A had been catapulted permanently into the past, in which case, far from bearing him back to the future, the present car was simply bearing him to another vineyard village or to the exquisite city that occupied the future site of Edom II.

There was a slight lurch. "Sunset," the A.P. intoned. "Sunset."

Shepard should have known relief, but he didn't. Instead, he knew disappointment, and when he left the car at Sands some fifteen minutes later and climbed the stairs to the street, he wished with all his being that he'd stayed in the past where he belonged. After the fragrance of the vineyards, the sterile air of the dome seemed stale. After the atmosphere-softened starlight of yesterday, today's starlight seemed cold and hostile. After the houses of Wistaria, the apartment buildings of Sands seemed bleak and austere. Sadly he entered the one in which he lived. Morosely he climbed the stairs.

His mood passed as he prepared for bed. If he had gone back once, he could go back again. He had found the Magic Casement, and he held the key. Or had the whole thing been a dream? A glance at his watch assured him that it had not been — or that if it had, an hour was missing from his life. And he could account for that hour—every unforgettable second of it.

Before climbing into bed, he mixed himself a nightcap. After the

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glass of Mars he had drunk it tasted flat, but he drank it anyway, and turned out the light and slipped between the cool clean sheets. Sleep was a long time in coming, and when it finally came he dreamed of Thandora.

He awoke to Miss Fromm. Two months ago, after showing up late for work three mornings in a row, he had made a standing arrangement with her to call him on the video phone every weekday morning at seven o'clock. Miss Fromm had been a sergeant in the Martian Wacs before coming to work at the Bureau, and he had had cause to regret the arrangement many times, but in the interest of punctuality he had accepted it as a necessary evil.

Now, he had cause to regret it again. "Time to hit the deck!" she cried when he snapped on the vp after the buzzer brought him out of a deep sleep. "Let go your — "

He bounded out of bed. "That'll be all, Miss Fromm — I'm up."

Vps were precision instruments and when they transmitted an image of a person's face they did so with a vengeance, bringing to light wrinkles and blemishes that were immune to ordinary reality. Miss Fromm, clearly, had none of either, and despite himself and for the dozenth time, he couldn't help thinking of how vividly the freshness of her morning face brought to mind the freshness of a morning flower. This annoyed him no end, although he couldn't imagine why. "I said that'll be all, Miss Fromm. There's no reason for you to retain the connection any longer."

"I'm — I'm sorry for that mean remark I made last night, Mr. Shepard. You know — the one about you and romance. I didn't mean it — honest I didn't. I think you're the most romantic man that ever lived . . . Especially in your pajamas."

"Miss Fromm!"

"Flash! — I've lost a pound. I now weight only one hundred and twenty-seven. Stripped." She severed the connection and the screen went blank.

He sighed. Then he stepped into the lavatory and turned on the water for his morning shower. He was going to have to do something about Miss Fromm.

She met him at the entrance of the Geology Building and rode up with him on the lift. "Overtime tonight, Mr. Shepard?"

Half of him was in Mars Present and the other half was in Mars Past. The cold light of morning had cast considerable doubt on the validity of his experience of the night before, but he was still convinced that it hadn't been a dream. "No. We'll be done by six."

"Good — you can take me out to dinner."

It was far from being the first time she had come up with the suggestion, and he was about to resort to one of his regular excuses when it occurred to him that if he was going to take the 12:20 local that night he was going to have a lot of time to kill. He could, of course, go home and then come back again; but somehow the prospect of whiling away the evening in his apartment seemed singularly unat-

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tractive all of a sudden. "All right, Miss Fromm — where would you like to go?"

She gasped. and her gray eyes filled up with microcosmic stars. "Are — are you *really* going to take me, Mr. Shepard?"

"Miss Fromm, I can't figure you out. First, you—"

"The Sundown Steppe, and I'll wear my new yellow gaddress!"

She did, too. At least he assume that the clinging synthi-silk creation she had on when he called for her after killing an hour in the public library was a gaddress. In any event, it did things for her — things that, in some cases, hadn't needed to be done.

The Steppe was on the roof of the Hydroponics Building. Shepard had been there on several previous occasions, but this was the first time he had dined there at sunset. The perfect transparency of the dome gave the impression that nothing lay between the roof and the sky, and the proximity of the Hydroponics Building to the perimeter of the city provided a nonpareil view of the Great Thymiamata Plain. The distant sun was just beginning to dip beneath the horizon as he and Miss Fromm sat down at a choice table near the roof's edge, and the plain was pure gold, while the sky, immune to the dying light, was turning from lavender to deep purple. The intense cold and the thin air gave the colors a startling distinctness.

Miss Fromm regarded him radiantly across the table after the waiter took their order. "I did forty-seven pushups today. Formerly, my record was forty-three."

Shepard doubted whether he could do ten. "Now why should you want to do forty-seven pushups?" he asked.

"Good for the pectorals. See?" Miss Fromm took a deep breath and tensed the muscles in question. He had to admit that the results were startling — perhaps even a little terrifying. But he still didn't feel that he'd obtained a satisfactory answer to his question. "I still don't see why."

"Because I'm working for a thirty-nine — that's why."

He thought of Thandora. Thandora of the hyacinth hair, the classic face. You'd never catch *her* trying to emulate a milch cow. "I *still* don't see why."

"So you'll appreciate me more, of course."

He sighed. Take us the foxes, he thought. The little foxes. Miss Fromm was a big fox. She could spoil more vines in one day than an ordinary fox could in two. He looked at the sunset again. The sky was pure purple now, and eccentricities in the atmosphere had shattered the fading light and transformed it into a vast golden fretwork. If Miss Fromm was aware of the beautiful metamorphosis, she gave no sign.

The waiter brought their synthi-soup. While they were waiting for the entree he asked her what part of Mars she came from. Not that he really cared, but there was such a thing as being polite.

"I come from a little town near Aeolis. After I was discharged from

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the Wacs, I decided to settle down as far away from my folks as I could get."

"Don't you like them?"

"Of course I like them. I love them. But it's the custom for Martian girls to go out on their own when they get to be twenty-two, and if you're going to do something you should do it right."

He let it go at that. The conduct of Martian girls when they reached the age of twenty-two was no concern of his. Neither he nor anybody else was going to remold the sorry Martian scheme of things at this late date.

He looked at his watch. 8:19. Four hours to go yet. Maybe he could have returned to the shores of yesterday on an earlier pneumo-car. Maybe the Magic Casement wasn't confined to the 12:20 local. Maybe it was open all the time.

And then again, maybe it had opened for the first and the last time, and tonight there would be no Kandzkaza, no Wistaria—

No Thandora —

VI

There was a Kandzkaza, though. And a Wistaria . . . He got off the car breathless, and breathed in the rich fragrance of the past. Then he climbed the ramp, shaking himself free from the memory of Miss Fromm. She had invited him in for coffee when he took her home after treating her to a recently released Earth tridi-extravaganza at the Edom Palace, and for a while he'd thought she wasn't going to let him leave until he kissed her. He was going to have to do something about Miss Fromm.

Both moons were on high, Deimos drifting daintily, Phobos plummeting across the wild starred sky. The distant cities were exquisite oases of light and lineation, and in them, probably, thinkers walked, weighing mighty matters and extrapolating the present; predicting, perhaps, the very day when the atmosphere would thin to a point where life would no longer be possible and their race would lose its place in the sun.

The little town of Wistaria slept beneath the stars, and no one was abroad on its single street. Would Thandora still be up? He came to her house presently. Yes, she was still up. He could see her through the window in the sliding door. She was sitting at the stone table writing something in a metallic book with a pen that brought to mind a miniature acetylene torch. Poetry, no doubt. Yes, he was sure that that was what she was writing. It virtually had to be. He breathed deeply of the sweetness of the ripe and ripening grapes and knocked gently on the door. She smiled warmly when she opened it and saw him. Then she put her finger to her lips and ushered him inside.

They sat down at the table and she poured him wine. Without further preamble, she began teaching him the language. He had no objections. On the contrary, he could hardly wait to learn the noble tongue. The wine quadrupled his powers of concentration and he assimilated with the greatest of ease

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the words she fired at him in machine-gun-like bursts, automatically cataloguing them and effortlessly memorizing their meanings. No wonder the Martians of old had developed so many great thinkers and built so many halls of learning. With such a divine elixir to stimulate their already hyper-developed faculties, the true nature of the universe must have seemed as uncomplicated to them as the Lucretian concept seemed to twenty-first century Earthmen.

Thandora poured him more of the wondrous stuff. He raised the flower-shaped glass and sipped, looking deep into her azure eyes. How pure and shining she seemed after Miss Fromm! How soft and sweet her voice! How becoming her gentle mien! *She* would never resort to pushups to build up her breasts. *She* would never brag about her measurements. *She* would never turn herself into a veritable sex-machine. Thandora was a *real* Martian.

On desperate seas long wont to roam, he thought —

> *Thy hyacinth hair, thy classic face,*
> *Thy Naiad airs have brought me home*
> *To the glory that was Greece,*
> *To the grandeur that was Rome.*

It came time for him to leave. Thanks to the magic properties of the wine, he had absorbed enough of the language to bid her good-by with words as well as gestures, and to tell her in a similar fashion that he would return on the following night — early in the evening, if possible. She nodded eagerly, and pressed her left hand to her own heart and her right to his, just as she had done the night before. Touched, he let himself out the door and walked humbly down the street to the station. Could he ever make himself worthy of so divine a creature? Could he ever elevate himself to the lofty plateau on which she lived and earn the right to win her love?

He would try.

The prospect of spending a whole evening with her lent him a euphoria that remained with him throughout all of the next day. It was still with him when he boarded the 6:18 Edom I-Edom II local after work, but its minutes were numbered. The pneumo-car proceeded directly from Red Rock to Sunset with no stops in between, and thence to Sands. Dejectedly he got off and filed up the stairs with the other Sands commuters. In his apartment, he showered and shaved; then, remembering that he hadn't eaten, he looked in the wall-fridge. There was plenty of cold air there, but that was about all. He thought for a moment. Sands had several restaurants, but none of them bothered to camouflage the synthi-food they served, and as a result their meals were singularly uninspiring. Somehow, after the events of the last few days, he couldn't bear the thought of an uninspiring meal; and besides, he had to return to Edom I sooner or later in order to catch the first

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section of the 12:20 Edom I-Edom II local, so why not fight his appetite for a while and enjoy a good meal at the Sundown Steppe?

It wouldn't do for him to dine there alone, though. The Steppe was a place where you took your wife or your girl friend, and stags were frowned upon. And then, too, there would be several hours to kill afterward.

Had Miss Fromm eaten yet? he wondered. Not that she was his girl friend, of course; but he had to take someone. He gave her a buzz on the video phone. She must have just got out of the shower, because her dark hair had a damp aspect, and a series of moist ringlets had fallen down over her forehead and a little line of moisture glistened along her upper lip. Moreover, even though all he could see of her was her face, he received the distinct impression that she didn't have any clothes on.

He cleared his throat. "Have — have you had dinner yet, Miss Fromm?"

She was staring at his image as though she couldn't believe her eyes — or her ears either, for that matter. "No, Mr. Shepard — I was just getting ready to go out to eat."

"Then wait till I get there and we'll go out together — all right?"

"Well I guess, all right!"

She must have bought a new gaddress. Anyway, when she opened her door in response to his ring, she had a blue one on instead of a yellow one. It did even more for her than the yellow one had. "Guess what?" were her first words. "I made it. Now I'm a thirty-nine!"

Pushups, apparently, paid off.

After dinner at the Steppe, he took her to a tridi-play at a little second-run theater just off Edom Avenue. She wanted to sit in the balcony, but he turned thumbs down on the idea. He couldn't very well say no, though, when she invited him in after he took her home. For one thing, it would have been rude, and for another he still had one more hour to kill. She opened two containers of beer and made sandwiches, and they watched some canned garbage on TV, with him sitting on the sofa and her perched on the arm beside him. For some reason he had a hard time concentrating on the cliches.

At length he glanced at his watch and got to his feet. Promptly she positioned herself between him and the door. "From the way you're acting, anyone would think you've got a late date or something, Mr. Shepard."

"Maybe I have. Anyway, I've got to go."

He tried to walk around her. She stepped two swift paces to the right and blocked him. "Now see here, Miss Fromm — "

"You're not setting foot outside this apartment until after you've kissed me good night!"

He sighed. There was nothing for it, he supposed. Gingerly he put his arms around her waist and pressed his lips to hers. Immediately an acute weakness came into his knees and his mind started to pinwheel. It was what he deserved for drinking a whole container of beer. Her

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arms were around his neck, and he extricated himself with considerable difficulty. "I really have to go now, Miss Fromm."

She didn't say a word. She just stood there with her eyes half-closed, moaning softly to herself. He let himself out the door and hurried to the lift. He made it to the Terminal just in time.

Thandora was waiting for him at the door. She put her finger to her lips. "Zzzzzzz!" she said. He apologized for having failed to arrive earlier, and they went inside. The metallic book was lying on the table and he could tell that she had been writing in it again. Beside it stood the flower-like glass brimming with wine. He raised it to his lips and took a delicious draught. Ever since he'd left Miss Fromm's apartment his hands had been trembling; now they steadied, and his mind became crystal-clear.

His clarity of thought was abetted immeasurably by his determination to learn the language as rapidly as possible. Once he was able to communicate fluently with the inhabitants of this classic world, he would obtain work of some kind and burn his bridges behind him and move there permanently. The sooner he left Mars Present, the better.

Thandora went outside with him when it was time for him to go. Standing on tiptoe, she kissed him good-by. It was a sweet maidenly kiss, and embodied the quintessence of the long-ago lovely world in which she lived. "Till tomorrow night," she whispered as they drew apart. "Yes," he whispered back, and floated down the starlit street.

Miss Fromm had news for him when she video phoned him the next morning. "Flash! I measured wrong the other day — I'm a *forty*, not a thirty-nine! You should *see*!"

He regarded her blearily from his bed.

It seemed as thought he'd just closed his eyes. "Miss Fromm, that's hardly a suitable subject to bring up the first thing in the morning."

He closed his eyes, was about to doze off again when she cried, "Time to hit the deck! Let go your — "

He bounded out of bed. "Miss Fromm!"

She grinned at him and severed the connection. He was going to have to do something about Miss Fromm.

But that evening, confronted once more with the problem of what to do with himself till the first section of the 12:20 local departed for Mars Past and more loathe than ever to spend the intervening hours in his apartment, he was forced to ask her out to dinner again and to take her to another second-run tridi-theater. Afterward, as they were passing one of the stands of ruins on their way back to her apartment, he was astonished when she suggested that they slip through one of the gaps in the flimsy fence and stroll among the ancient structures and soak up, as she put it, "some of the culture of the days of old."

He was delighted as well. Maybe he'd been misjudging Miss Fromm all along.

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The ruins consisted of the walls of a caved-in hall of higher learning and the walls of the various lesser buildings that had surrounded it. In the light of the moons the walls looked like huge misshapen tombstones for the most part, but the grandeur was still there, and so was the glory, and Shepard saw Martians, just as he always did, strolling in the starlight and conversing in groups and reading from large metallic volumes. Some of them wore flowing white robes and others were variously clad in pastel silks. The men were god-like of body and noble of countenance. The women were tall and cool and beautiful. One of them was Thandora. She was carrying the same book he had seen her writing in at the stone table and every now and then she paused long enough in her solitary walk to write something in it again. Yes, he was certain now. She had been to ancient Mars what Sappho had been to ancient Greece. *Ah, Psyche, from the regions which were Holy Land!*

Miss Fromm pointed to a small ruin that still retained three of its walls and most of its roof. "I wonder what's in there?"

He was curious, too. "Let's have a look."

They stepped into velvety shadows. Presently Shepard made out a stone shelf with a little niche just above it, and he gasped. "Why, this is a philosopher's apse! Whenever one of the great thinkers had a weighty problem to solve, he'd retire to a place like this, light a three-day candle, set it in the niche, and stand before it till it burned down. If, by that time, he hadn't found an answer he'd light another three-day candle, and so on, until he did. Those were the days, Miss Fromm!"

She was standing very close to him. "Brrrr! it's spooky in here! Hold my hand."

Absently, he complied; then he opened his mouth to continue his discourse. But for some reason, no words came. Miss Fromm was standing uncommonly close to him — so close, in fact, that her body was touching his. No, not touching it — pressing against it. He could feel her breath against his cheek, and when he turned his head her dark hair brushed his lips. It was as soft and fragrant as a summer's night, and the first thing he knew he was kissing her, and the whole cosmos was spinning like a kaleidoscopic pinwheel.

It was the last thing he knew for a long time. Objectively, that is. One second he was in the constellation of Pegasus and the next he was in the midst of the Horsehead Nebula. The Pleiades sped past his eyes . . . Cassiopeia's Chair . . . Berenice's Hair . . . and all the while, someone kept saying, "Shep, Shep, Shep, Shep." He ended up way out in the middle of Messier 32. He thought he'd never get back to Mars, and when he finally did, he was horrified.

It was like desecrating someone's grave. When he and Miss Fromm made their way back through the ruins to the street, he saw no Martians. He had driven them all away.

Now *he* was one of the little foxes.

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Walking her home, he said hardly two words to her, and for once she, too, was uncommunicative. After bidding her good night at the street door of her apartment building, he hurried away. He never wanted to see her again.

He proceeded directly to the Terminal. Fifteen minutes still separated him from the magic moment when the first section of the 12:20 Edom I-Edom II local departed for the past. Hounded by his self-contempt, he spent them wandering about the empty concourse like a lost soul.

At length he realized that he was standing before the electronic bulletin board, reading an announcement:

DUE TO A LACK OF COMMUTERS, BOTH SECTIONS OF THE RECENTLY INITIATED 12:20 EDOM I-RED ROCK-SUNSET-SANDS-ACREAGE-MORAINE-ARROYO-EDOM II RUN WILL BE PERMANENTLY DISCONTINUED AFTER TONIGHT.

VI

Stunned, he read the words again. They adamantly refused to modify their message.

The Magic Casement was on the verge of closing. When he returned after this visit, the Grand Past would be forever beyond his reach.

If he returned.

He thought of the Earth cities crowding around the noble ruins, demeaning them with glass-slab apartment buildings and cheap cafes. He thought of the hordes of pseudo-Martians capitalizing on an ancient civilization whose feet they weren't fit to kiss. He thought of kids someday playing baseball on fields where once Great Martian Games had been held. He thought of hot-dog stands someday being built on the worn flagstones of once-sacred courtyards, of blatant billboards someday eclipsing classic facades; of supermarkets someday rising on the erstwhile sites of halls of higher learning —

He thought of himself and Miss Fromm making a beast-of-two-backs in the sacred philosopher's apse.

Shuddering, he stumbled down the stairs to level 6 and boarded pneumo-car no. 29-A. When the door closed, he said good-by. To Mars Present, to Miss Fromm — and to himself.

Again, Thandora was waiting for him at the door. She was carrying the metallic book and she had been writing in it again. When they sat down at the table this time, she did not sit down across from him, as had been her wont before, but next to him, as close as she could get.

He could smell the heady fragrance of her hyacinth hair.

He thumbed through the metallic leaves of the book, gazing reverently at the poems she had written. Soon, he would be able to read them. Soon, he would have mastered the language sufficiently for him to be able to go to the city and get a job. Then he would come back for her, and ask her to be his. And when he married her, it would symbolize his marrying Mars Past, for he wanted Mars Past as much as he wanted her, and in a way they were one and the same thing.

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She resumed his language lessons. She poured him wine. Time dreamed by. Suddenly he realized that he was holding her hand. He couldn't remember afterward exactly when it was she had climbed upon his lap but it must have been just a little while before the door at the rear of the room opened and the six sunburned men came in. By then, her arms were around his neck and he was kissing her.

She drew away, but she didn't get off his lap. One of the sunburned men was carrying a weird weapon that looked something like a shotgun. He pointed it at Shepard. "I guess you know what comes next, friend."

Shepard was furious. "Tell your brothers they don't have to *force* me to marry you, Thandora — I *want* to marry you!"

"They are not my brothers — they are my husbands. And it is up to you to tell them."

He got out from under her. Fast. "Why didn't — "

"We are short of help for this year's harvest and will be short for next year's too. Therefore, it was only natural that I should have used the customary method of acquiring an extra hand and lured you here and involved you in a compromising situation. Help is very hard to get these days. If you work out all right, you will be given a small partnership in the farm. For the time being, you will receive a percentage of the market-value of every basket of grapes you pick. And you will have to pick very many of them. Already we have fallen far behind because you had to be taught the language."

Shepard was staring at her. Why, she wasn't even curious to know why he hadn't already known the language. Nor was she in the least curious about where he came from. She saw in him a field-hand and a part-time husband — and nothing else.

Far from being a high-minded poetess, she was a polygamous peasant. And that metallic book lying on the table — it wasn't a notebook in which she wrote verses: it was a ledger in which she kept accounts.

Horrified, he got to his feet. The room seemed sordid all of a sudden —sordid and mean and ugly. It had been said many times that the ruins of Rome were misleading because only those buildings that had been made of stone had endured. The rest — the common everyday structures — had been made of far less durable materials and had been gutted time and again by fire and had finally disappeared from the face of the earth. Could the same be said for Martian ruins?

He knew suddenly that it could be. The Martians had brought out the best of themselves in stone, the worst, in mud and bricks. And for every one of their noble edifices that had endured, there were a thousand hovels that had not.

The same could be said for the rest of their civilization. For every philosopher they had produced, they had produced a thousand money-lenders. For every saint, a thousand sinners. For every poet, a thousand peasants.

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And that was the way it had to be. A civilization could stand in no other way. It had to have a footing, and the footing was its economy, and its economy was comprised, in the final analysis, of people like Thandora and her six husbands. Of people like Miss Fromm and himself. Of the proprietors of cheap cafes and the exploiters of new territories. Earth had halls of higher learning, too.

Perhaps so, but he was damned if he was going to pay for the flagstones upon which the Martian thinkers had walked.

He started edging toward the door. Promptly the man with the weird weapon ran over and blocked it.

Shepard did the only thing he could do — he jumped through the nearest window. Then he pounded down the street, Thandora's six husbands in pursuit. No. 29-B — or its ancient Martian equivalent — was just getting ready to pull out when he reached the station. He made it through the doorway just in time.

After he got off at Sands, he climbed wearily to the street and stood for a long time in the dome-filtered starlight. He felt like a fool. But far worse than that, he felt empty. He would never be able to look at the ruins now without thinking of the avaricious Thandora and her six fieldhand-husbands; without remembering the distant noble towers and the innumerable buildings that had stood among them and that had undoubtedly been even uglier than the bright new buildings that stood high among their remains.

Disconsolately he walked down the street to his apartment building. Dejectedly he climbed the stairs to his rooms. He removed his coat and fixed himself a potent nightcap.

While he was drinking it, the vp buzzed. He turned it on and found himself looking at the face of the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. He was at a loss to understand whose face it was until its owner smiled and showed the slight gap between her front teeth. "Hi, Shep."

"Hel — hello. You should be in bed."

"I couldn't sleep till I talked to you. Already, I've called you three times."

"I've — I've been out walking."

"You couldn't sleep either."

"N —no, I guess I couldn't."

"What time will you take me to dinner tomorrow? It's Sunday."

So it was. "I'll call for you at one."

"I'll be waiting. And Shep?"

"Yes?"

"Did you notice?"

"Notice what?"

"That I was still a vir —"

"Miss Fromm!"

She grinned at him. "Good night, Shep."

"Good night, Ruth."

He severed the connection. The screen went blank. He drank the rest of his nightcap, undressed, and got into bed. He turned off the light.

He lay there in the darkness. Thinking. He was going to have to do something about Miss Fromm.

And finally he did. He married her. END

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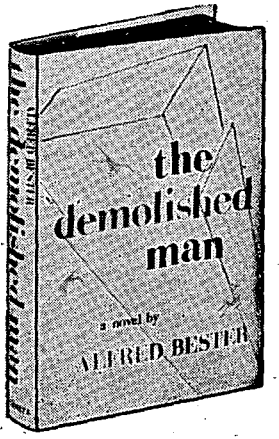

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